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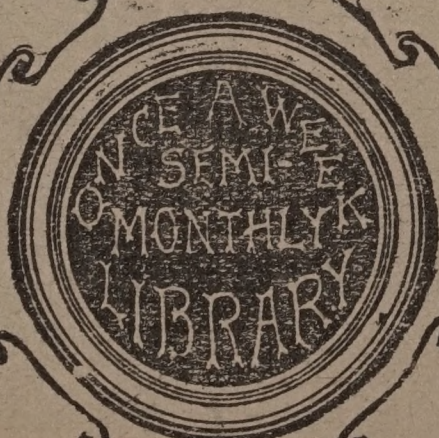
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MY
UNCLE SCIPIO

BY
ANDRE THEURIET

Specially translated for ONCE A WEEK by
E. P. ROBINS



Pears' Soap

Pears' Soap does nothing but cleanse ; it has no medical properties, but brings back health and the color of health to many a sallow skin. Use it often. Give it time.

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1893

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MY UNCLE SCIPIO.

CHAPTER I.

UP to the time when I was ten years old my notions concerning my uncle Scipio Mouginot were of the vaguest. The picture of him that rose before my youthful mind was blurred and dim, being simply that of an unknown relative who had his abode very far away, at Paris, and whose name, whenever it was mentioned in our family circle, was received with a contemptuous toss of the head. It was on a Sunday evening, in June, 1850, as I well remember, that I for the first time acquired a more distinct conception of this mysterious member of our family. The date of that ever-memorable evening is impressed upon my recollection the more indelibly that it also recalls a disagreeable circumstance that happened me during the day. The weather that Sunday was ideally fine: the sky was cloudless, the sun shone brightly, a gentle wind from the east blew the dust in clouds along the Rue du Bourg. When the midday meal was concluded, I left the house in company with my cousin, Aristide Mouginot-Pechoin, my guardian's son — a good boy, he was, as quiet and well-behaved as I was rude and turbulent. Grandma Pe-

choin presented us each with ten sous for our week's spending money, and my aunt gave us reiterated injunctions not to absent ourselves from vespers.

I can see ourselves now, just as we looked on that sunny afternoon, sauntering down the street side by side, dressed exactly alike, in black trousers, white waistcoats and those short English jackets that they used to call roundabouts. Aristide's suit is new, however, while mine is threadbare and has lost its freshness. As it is only one o'clock, we take the longest way to reach the church. When we reach the bank of the Marne and Rhine Canal, which has been opened only recently, we suddenly find ourselves in the midst of a crowd of pleasure-seekers, all in their Sunday best, gathered compactly around a large boat that has been freshly caulked and is decked out with flags and streamers. I drag Aristide along with me, and shouldering my way into thickest of the fray, there learn that the master of the boat, for a consideration of fifty centimes, will give those who are so inclined an excursion on the canal.

The bright sunshine and the laughing water conspire to whisper in my ear an invitation to play truant; my boyish imagination takes fire at the idea of that adventurous voyage. I look at Aristide with eyes sparkling with eagerness.

"Ten sous!" I say to him; "are you game for it?"

But the cousin, who is a thrifty body where

money is concerned, gives me a horrified look out of his big round eyes, and with his provokingly virtuous air makes answer :

“How can you think of such a thing ! And vespers ?—”

“Oh, hang vespers ! There’s more fun to be had in the boat. Come along !”

Aristide refuses resolutely to be tempted, and the firmness of his resistance makes me all the more determined to carry my caprice into execution. I hand my ten-sou piece to the man whose duty it is to receive the money, and, as I jump on board the boat, shout to my cousin :

“I will meet you when church comes out. Wait for me, and be sure you don’t say anything to give me away !”

The clumsy barge, drawn by two tow-horses, glides sluggishly over the green bosom of the canal, the flags snap like a whiplash in the freshening breeze, and it is altogether a delightful sensation to feel one’s self floating between the two banks with their bordering rows of plane trees, while overhead the swallows are sporting in the blue sky and the church bells, ringing the last summons for vespers, dash the delight of stolen joys with a tinge of keen remorse. When the boat comes to a lock it stops for a moment, imprisoned between the lofty walls, the gates are opened, and the intrushing crystal tide sends gleams of sunlight dancing over the face of the dripping stonework.

While the stoppage lasts the passengers step ashore and stretch their legs on the towpath. I follow their example, but when the steersman

summons us to come aboard again it is seen that the boat, owing to the rise of water in the lock, sets much higher above the surface than she did before; the step is too high for my short legs. A boatman, with the best intentions in the world, seizes me by the arm to assist me upward; I make a desperate effort to pass my leg over the rail, when, confound the luck! I feel the tender cloth of my trousers yielding at the seat beneath the strain. I give utterance to a cry of distress, the man in his disgust lets go my arm, and I am left lying on the stone causeway, while the boat, with its cargo of laughing spectators, recedes and is lost to sight among the flaunting poppies that deck the banks.

There I am, chapfallen and alone, exposed to the blinding sunshine of the towpath. I carry my hand to the place where my garment has served me so treacherously, and tremblingly proceed to acquaint myself with the extent of the disaster. The rent is of large dimensions, and with that ridiculous roundabout there is no way of concealing the *corpus delicti*. People cannot help noticing it! And Aristide, who is to wait for me when church is dismissed! how am I ever to keep my appointment with him, and exhibit myself before the congregation with my attire in such a state?

I attempt to repair damages with some pins that the gatekeeper's wife gives me, but it is no use; the cloth is too rotten, and the pins give way every time I move my legs, making the gaping wound still larger than it was before. There is but one safe course left me, and

that is to regain my home as quickly as possible. Behold me, therefore, pursuing my melancholy way cityward beneath the spreading plane trees that overarch the roadway. As long as I keep to the canal the experience is not such a very disagreeable trial; the banks are deserted, and there is no one to witness my mortification, but before me lies Villotte, the smoke from whose chimneys is rising off yonder from behind its screen of trees, and there the sidewalks are thronged with promenaders. The mere thought of it brings the blood in torrents to my cheeks. Shamefacedly I creep through the least frequented lanes and by-ways, hugging the walls, and so at last I come to the street on which faces the coachhouse of the Mouginot-Pechoin family. I steal in on tiptoe, silent as a mouse, and, invoking the cloak of obscurity to hide my shame and sorrow, await in the darkness of a disused lumber-room the advent of the twilight hour, when I know I shall hear old Adele summoning my uncle's boarder, Lawyer Dieudonne Jacobi, to come to supper.

Lawyer Jacobi is near-sighted, and, what is more, I know that he is not very observant. As Grandmother Pechoin says: "He looks within." He is always the first one in the dining-room. I lay my plans to effect my entrance in his company; so doing I shall be safely seated, with my back to the wall, when the remainder of the family make their appearance—

Ouf! everything has passed off nicely in accordance with my hopes and wishes, and now

I am perched aloft on my high chair, in such a posture that no one can have any reason to suspect the damage sustained by the widest portion of my nether garment. The dining-room, a narrow, three-cornered apartment, is situated directly in the rear of the shop of my uncle Mouginot-Pechoin — who is the leading pharmacist of Villotte; the only light it receives is afforded by a window of ground glass, the lower sash of which plays up and down in grooves, thus forming a sort of peephole through which cognizance may be taken of the happenings of the shop. Owing to the stifling heat the sash is raised this evening, and through the opening a view is obtained of the pharmacy, with its dazzlingly polished brass-work and its old pots and jars of immaculately white earthenware; and behind the great red and blue globes in the show-window we catch shadowy glimpses of the pedestrians on the sidewalk, who have left their houses to enjoy a stroll in the cool evening air. A lamp, with a ground-glass shade, diffuses an equable and yellow light throughout the room and illuminates the snowy cloth on which the repast is served.

There are seven of us seated around the board, counting Arsene Camus, the apprentice, who makes himself scarce as soon as the dessert is brought on. (That is an invariable rule that has never once been departed from since the Mouginot pharmacy has been in existence and made a practice of receiving apprentices.) Facing the window that looks into

the shop, in the first place, is Victor Mouginot, my uncle and guardian, a cold, phlegmatic, formal man of forty-eight, as inaccessible as the tight-locked closet where he bestows his poisons, and expressing himself always in the very briefest of sentences; a sternly-set, smooth-shaven, impenetrable face, in which the small gray eyes seem fixed in a stare of stony immobility; a rigid body, stiff and unbending as a ramrod, close-buttoned in an olive-colored frock coat, the long sleeves of which fall over a pair of fists as round and hard as one of his own pestles. At his right sits Grandmother Pechoin, a hale and stately old lady of seventy, who has had somewhat of renown as a beauty in her day, when Napoleon I. was emperor of France. The charm of feature is still to be observed beneath the lofty edifice of powdered hair, and the kindly eyes of lilac-blue, looking out from amid their enframement of silvery locks, make one think of violets blooming beneath the snow. A circumstance worthy of note is that she cannot endure her son-in-law, whose automaton-like frigidity gives her the fidgets, and she has a way of saying that Victor Mouginot cannot go near a chimney but he extinguishes the fire. Aristide Mouginot, my cousin, occupies the place on the left hand of his father, of whose repulsive manner he is a successful imitator: he is an only son, an infant phenomenon, whose perfections are constantly being dinned in my ears. He sits up straight on his stool, his napkin is always properly tucked beneath his chin, he does not get

gravy-spots on his "best clothes," he holds his tongue at table, and *never asks for anything*.

I don't see why he should, forsooth, when he is helped to everything there is, on the board! He does not play in the street with the little blackguard boys, he never talks back; in a word, he is perfect.

But although he may be good—my cousin Aristide—he is not handsome. The great prominent ears, standing forth boldly on each side of his flaxen pate, are like the fins of a fish. His eyebrows are so thin that one might almost count the hairs; he has white eyelashes, a pasty white complexion, and the regular Mouginot nose—the nose that runs in the family—which, in his case, has assumed the shape and size of a potato.

At the other end of the table, opposite my guardian, my aunt Mouginot sits in state. She has the form and something of the imposing air of her mother, but has not her affability and power to please. She suffers from neuralgia and keeps her head muffled in a black shawl, within the folds of which is visible at times a long, bilious-looking face, with yellow eyes, a sharp nose and juiceless lips. Her ill-health has given her the acidity, and something of the appearance, of a lemon, added to which she is disposed to irony and is not over-charitable. She has a way of asserting her authority by emphatic gestures, and every movement she makes is attended by a loud jingling of the keys which she carries hung in a bunch from her belt. This harsh clank of

steel has in the end impressed itself on my understanding as something inseparably connected with her personality, like the stridulous whirr of the locust or the sleep-murdering song of the mosquito, and I am conscious of a disagreeable sensation crawling over me every time I hear it. I have my place on her left hand, where I am subjected to her immediate and pitiless supervision; she never lets up on me for a moment, and every mouthful I eat is as gall and wormwood to me under the seasoning of her sarcastic comments. On Aunt Mouginot's right, obsequiously loquacious and profuse of small attentions, is my uncle's boarder, Dieudonne Jacobi, lawyer, a bachelor of fifty, who for fifteen years has been the friend and table companion of the family.

M. Dieudonne is a tall man, blonde as to his hair and pink as to his complexion, with a pepper-and-salt beard and small eyes of a faded blue. Notwithstanding the maturity of his years he affects a boyish manner and tone of voice, which contrast oddly enough with his gray beard. He dresses in dark colors and inexpensively, but still retains some youthful predilections, wearing turn-down collars *à la* Colin and bright-blue neckties with long streaming ends. Being blessed with an abundant flow of flowery language, he is a ceaseless talker; he is addicted to using obscure and high-sounding phrases, empty as a well that has gone dry; it matters not to him that they are entirely void of sense and meaning if he can but inflate them with tropes and metaphors. He

delights to discourse of the soul and of the heavenly bodies, for he is of a somewhat mystical and sentimental turn, but is not unmindful of his material entity, of which he takes precious good care.

As he has but a limited income he is constantly worrying over the question of ways and means for the future, and the prospect of approaching old age makes him very close-fisted. He only takes dinner and supper with us, and old Adele, our solitary domestic, declares that the small loaf which is brought in for his early breakfast is made to last him four days. He is very devout, never failing to be present at early morning mass, where he takes a seat under the organ-loft, on the bench set apart for the poor—"from motives of humility," he says, but in reality because the warden who hands around the plate turns back before he gets thus far. Although a lawyer by profession and a member of the Bar, he is seldom seen in court; his eloquence does not seem to have much weight with a jury, and the business community have discovered that his arguments are more rhetorical than sound. By way of counterpoise to this, he is the leading spirit of the *Society of Fine-bots, Belles-Lettres and Horticulture* of Villotte. From time to time, as some discovery is made in digging down the Mont de Fains—an old kettle, maybe, or a Gallo-Roman tumulus—he writes an essay and reads it before the society; then he has fifty copies of his lucubration struck off—at the society's expense, be it understood—and sends

them round among the houses where he visits. He has invented ever so many expedients, none of them dishonorable, however, whereby he may repay the obligations he incurs without putting his hand in his pocket. It is in this way that, in order to liquidate a portion of Uncle Mouginot's account for board and lodging, he has undertaken to instruct Aristide and me in the elements of French and Latin. Every morning we mount the stairs to his room on the second floor, facing on the street, where he makes us decline *rosa*, a rose, or inflicts on us a dictation selected from the most bombastic portion of his opusculé. Aristide is not a youth of brilliant parts, but he is industrious, while I, on the other hand, occupy myself with watching the sparrows that come chirping about the window, or listen to the cries of the hucksters wheeling their loads of fruit and vegetables along the street, and thus I fail every now and then to catch a word of the dictation, which has the effect of destroying the harmony of M. Dieudonne's style and procuring for me at the dinner-hour a sharp reprimand from my aunt Mouginot.

It is M. Dieudonne who does all the talking at supper this evening. My uncle is a man of few words, my aunt is suffering from her neuralgia, so that were it not for Lawyer Jacobi our repast would be a very silent one. But he considers it a matter of duty to keep the conversation going; M. Dieudonne will talk on any and every subject, even if he is reduced to talking nonsense, rather than suffer one of those con-

versational breaks which cause people to say : "An angel is flying over the house." He chatters on and on, piling metaphor on trope and trope on metaphor, until he is called to order by the good-natured raillery of Grandma Pechoin. The old lady is very sensible, and takes no stock in his fiddle-faddle ; what she appreciates more than anything else is lucidity, and she makes no bones of so telling the sentimental lawyer.

"Ah, madame, you have clipped my wings !" he thereon exclaims in his mellifluous boyish voice.

We have just finished the second course, a vinaigrette made from the boiled meat of the pot-au-feu ; Adele brings in the cheese in the midst of one of those silences that are so afflictive to M. Jacobi. Incontinently he starts off again :

"I attended vespers at Notre Dame this afternoon in order to hear the *Magnificat*, which is rendered there with an amplitude and a depth of feeling which never fails to raise me out of myself and sweep me away in a mystical whirlwind of soul —"

"What's that ?" Grandma Pechoin mischievously inquired ; "I don't comprehend you. Whirlwinds of dust I have seen many a time ; whirlwind of soul, never !"

"You ought to know by this time, mother," Aunt Mouginot ironically remarks, "that M. Jacobi doesn't talk like the rest of us."

"Oh, madame !" the offended lawyer rejoins, "if that is the way you take me up just for a

little figure of speech, I shall keep my mouth shut in future."

He stops, looks around him, and surprises on my face an irreverent smile.

"By the way," he goes on, giving me an ugly look, "I looked for you at church, Jacques, but Aristide seemed to have the bench all to himself. Where had you stowed yourself?"

I experienced a disagreeable sensation as of a stream of cold water trickling down my back, and begin to blush.

"Why were you not with Aristide, you bad boy?" my aunt severely demands.

My virtuous cousin is watching me furtively out of the corner of his eye; I feel that my misdemeanor is about to be brought home to me, and the thought makes me lose countenance. Already my uncle's basilisk eyes are fastened on me — already my aunt's sharp nose, breathing dire threats, is outstretched in my direction, when a thrice-fortunate incident occurs to create a diversion. The shop-door is thrown open with a bang, the little bell tinkles, and a voice hoarse by reason of frequent potations shouts: "Letters!" At the same time, casting a glance through the sliding window, I make out the silhouette of the letter-carrier, who thrusts his hand down into his tin box and brings out a sealed envelope.

"A letter for you, Monsieur Mouginot. Ten sous due."

A big red hand is introduced through the opening, delivers the letter, and waits expectant of the money, which my uncle counts out

grumblingly ; then the carrier takes himself off and the door is closed again. Every eye is fixed on Victor Mouginot, who puts on his spectacles and deliberately examines the envelope. No one thinks of questioning me further, and I breathe once more.

“Hum !” says my uncle, “that letter came from Paris. It is from my brother Scipio.”

“Oh, oh !” my aunt ill-naturedly insinuates, “if *he* writes to us you may be sure it is to beg for something.”

My uncle breaks the seal and reads. His face is as expressionless as the face of a wooden image, and it is impossible to tell by the play of his features whether the contents of the letter are pleasing or the reverse.

“Arsene !” he commands, with a significant glance toward the apprentice, “it is time for you to go back to the shop.”

Arsene Camus obeys, and my uncle, still holding the open letter in his hand, cautiously closes the window of communication, and, addressing himself to the company, continues in his customary unconcerned tone of voice, in which is perceptible, however, the slightest trace of irony :

“It is worth the ten sous. Listen !”

And in the same even voice he begins to read :

“MY DEAR VICTOR—It is a long, long time since I heard from the family and my old home, so I have determined to write and ask you for news. Although distance parts us,

we must not let the grass of oblivion grow on the path of brotherly affection—' ”

“ There's a noble image ! ” exclaims M. Dieu-donne. “ He is a fine writer, the animal is.”

“ It is very kind of you to say so, but don't interrupt me, if you please, Jacobi,” growls Uncle Victor. “ I will continue :

“ —brotherly affection. Since we met last I have been constantly cudgeling my brain, and have elicited many new ideas. I came across one recently which would have insured a fortune to us all, but I had the imprudence to make a confidant of an idiot who made it public before the right time, and spoiled all, so that the returns have not been what I expected they would be. I have, therefore, found it necessary to shift my gun to the other shoulder. Adversity is a good teacher, sometimes. I am now on the track of a gigantic enterprise. I am digging away at it, and as soon as I shall have struck the vein it won't be by thousands that we shall count our profits—it will be by millions. Needs it I should say once more that it is into your coffers, my dearest relatives, that this auriferous stream will pour its golden tide. For me, the glory will suffice of having conducted to a successful end a great and patriotic enterprise ; what there is beyond shall be for my nephews. My laborious days and wakeful nights are filled with thoughts of them, and particularly of Jacques, that interesting orphan whom destiny has intrusted to our care,

and for whom I predict a brilliant future that shall not belie the promise of his precocious intelligence. Why can I not be with him, why can I not be with you all? By supplementing your knowledge with my experience, I would make of him a man in the true meaning of the word. Unfortunately I have irons in the fire. Duty forbids me to leave my post, and barren, but heartfelt, prayers and wishes are all, alas! that I have to contribute to my nephew's education. Capitalists are chary in these troublous times, and collections are made with difficulty. Owing to this, my dear Victor, I am compelled once again to beg you to grant me credit for my proportionate share, now nearly due, of the cost of maintenance of that dear child for the current six months. It will only be a loan for a brief time. I am a little hard-up just now, but as soon as I shall have struck the vein the family shall be repaid every penny they have expended. All I can say to you at present is: I hear the rustling of the wings of Fortune above my head, and as soon as the jade is within reach I will not fail to grasp her. For that you have the word of your devoted and persevering brother, who sends a kiss to all of you,

“ ‘SCIPIO MOUGINOT.’ ”

“What do you think of it?” my uncle Victor asks between his close-set teeth.

“Another of his schemes for bamboozling the unwary!” my aunt snorts with infinite contempt. “What a humbug that man is!”

"I don't care," assertively declares Lawyer Jacobi, "he wields a graceful pen all the same."

"Words, empty words!" is Grandma Pechoin's verdict. "That's what I call promising more butter than bread."

For my part, I am very much inclined to share M. Dieudonne's admiration. The millions evoked with such facility by Scipio Mouginot's golden pen dazzle me, and I am of opinion that they are unnecessarily severe on that uncle who intends to make me a rich man and has such a flattering idea of my capacity.

"What strikes me most evidently in this business," my uncle gloomily observes, "is that we are to have Jacques on our hands entirely at our expense."

"Yes," my aunt continues, turning her eyes on me, "fresh sacrifices are to be imposed on us for this boy's sake. Let us hope that he will not prove ungrateful, and that he will do what in him lies to repay our kindness by obedience and good behavior—"

She delivers her little sermon with a countenance as sour as vinegar, and I am bitterly mortified. I cannot help thinking that altogether too much fuss is made over the sacrifices that the family is subjected to on my account, and the thought of my mind is betrayed on my countenance by a sulky grimace that proves highly displeasing to my touchy relative.

"Well, sir!" she cries, shaking me as if I were a plum tree, "why don't you answer?"

She shakes me so violently that I lose my equilibrium and tumble off my stool, and do it so maladroitly, moreover, that I turn my back to my aunt in falling, and the yawning rent in the seat of my trousers is presented full to her horrified gaze in the lamplight.

"Holy Virgin ! what do my eyes behold ?" exclaims Mme. Mouginot in a tone of indignant anger. "Where have you been, and what have you been doing, to ruin a pair of trousers that were new only the other day ? Answer, *bri-sacque !*"

Grasping me by the shoulders, she stands me against the wall and holds me there, transfixing me with a look that searches my very soul. I have not learned how to lie, and with eyes downcast I make a clean breast of my iniquity : my temptation, the boat-trip, the absence from church, and all the rest of it.

"That's what comes of disobedience," my aunt replies. "If you had been a good boy and gone with Aristide to vespers, you would not have torn your trousers. To-morrow you will stay in the house and have dry bread to eat. We are not rich enough to buy you new clothes every day !"

"And since he is so fond of the water," Uncle Victor sententiously adds, "when he is fifteen I will see if I can get him a berth on board the training ship. That will do — let him take himself off to bed !"

All rise from table, and as I am groping my way along the dark passage that conducts to the closet where Aristide and I sleep together

I am conscious of a gently caressing hand upon my head, smoothing my curls.

“Don’t cry, little one,” whispers Grandma Pechoin. “To-morrow, when the folks are all downstairs, do you come to my room; I will give you some chocolate to make your dry bread taste better — and I’ll mend your trousers for you.”

CHAPTER II.

KIND Grandma Pechoin is as good as her word. While seated at table about one o’clock the following day, with a white earthenware plate and a tumbler of water in front of me—I am munching my butterless bread, listening sadly the while to the cheerful clatter of pots and pans that rises from the kitchen underneath — my door turns softly on its hinges, and I behold the lovely white-haired old lady, who, raising her finger to her lips, signs to me to follow her. With catlike steps we make our way to her bedroom, the windows of which, opening on the courtyard, have a southern aspect and command a pleasant view of the upper town of Villotte.

The walls of the room are covered with a grayish paper with a flowered pattern, and the furniture is of the fashion that prevailed in the days of the First Empire: carved chairs with lyre-shaped backs, fauteuils ornamented with sphinxes’ heads, a white marble clock flanked by a pair of groups in Luneville faience repre-

senting the *Four Elements* and the *Four Seasons*. Suspended on the walls are prints that were popular in those days—"Cupid and Psyche," "Diana and Endymion"—and on each side of the chimney-glass are miniatures of friends and relatives long since dead and gone, ladies in high-necked, short-waisted gowns, officers in full uniform. The charming, old-fashioned furnishings form a setting that harmonizes admirably with the old lady's gracious aspect.

She goes to her closet and brings back a cake of chocolate, some biscuits and a wine-glass, into which she pours a thimbleful of muscat, then bids me seat myself at a small inlaid-top table where I am at liberty to indemnify myself at my ease for my penitential dinner.

"Don't hurry, child," says grandmother; "you have plenty of time. You can go away when the ladies come for their game of loto."

For many years it has been the custom for four or five old ladies, contemporaries of Grandma Pechoin, to come thrice a week and spend the afternoon playing loto in the apartment of my guardian's mother-in-law. Strange types they are of the past and gone society of Villotte: widows of old army officers, unmarried ladies, neat as a pin in their attire and wrinkled and shriveled as autumn leaves. They address one another familiarly by their Christian names—names that were in vogue many years ago, which seem to be in keeping with their antiquated toilets—Minette, Lenette, Mimi, Bastienne. Not infrequently it happens that M.

Dieudonne Jacobi, when he can spare the time from his society, joins the company of these delirious gamesters, and he looks after his winnings as sharply as any one. Sometimes, on rainy days, I am allowed to be present at their symposia, relegated to a corner where I am not in the way, with a picture-book upon my lap. The stake is one sou for each hand; it is usually Lawyer Jacobi who draws the numbers from the bag and calls them out in his dulcet voice; he never escapes being accused of cheating by those whose names are not down on his sheet. It is seldom that the game breaks up without a squabble; the moment that one of the players proclaims she has a *quine*, the others cast suspicious glances at her and enter their clamorous protest, the discussion comes perilously near developing into a quarrel, sharp words are bandied to and fro, then peace is gradually restored and a new game is started which, like its predecessor, ends tempestuously. In the intervals between games the news of the day is discussed, the petty scandals of the town are passed in review, and the conclusion is unanimously reached that Villotte is not what it used to be and the good old times have vanished, to return no more.

But before proceeding further with this history it will be in order for me to make you better acquainted with Villotte and with the position that the dynasty of the Mougins occupies therein.

The little city of Villotte, situated on the

confines of Lorraine and Champagne, has never made much noise in the world, and what celebrity it has acquired is owing entirely to the delicious flavor of its mirabelles. The cultivation of this fruit is the only culture that has received serious attention there; as to intellectual culture, its products are scarcely worth mentioning. Not that I would accuse the people of Villotte of lacking intelligence; they are quick-witted, shrewd and ready at repartee, but the prevailing tone is of the earth, earthy, and there is more disposition to scoff and sneer than to be enthusiastic. Even as the soil is wanting in depth and the tap-rooted trees soon lose their vigor, so the surroundings afford but scant encouragement to the dawning genius of the artist or the poet; the sons of the soil are upright merchants, brave soldiers, but if you look for men of imagination they are not to be found. There is a curious circumstance to be noted in connection with this: if, by some freak of nature, the imaginative faculty does manifest itself in the brain of some one of the indigenes, it suffers a sudden transformation, owing to atmospheric influence, and degenerates rapidly into mere eccentricity. This is the true explanation of the amphigorical style of the few Villottians who have dabbled in literature. They have a language of their own, full, unconsciously to themselves, of inconsequential nonsense and absurdity, delicious specimens of which are to be found in various archæological treatises of native production.

Delving among ancient recollections, the Mouginit family, as well as I can remember, was a pretty fair exponent of the qualities, good and bad, that characterized the inhabitants of Villotte. It consisted of four brothers, to whose patronymics the public had tacked on the names of their wives in order to distinguish them from one another. There were Mouginit-Tupin, Mouginit-Pechoin, Mouginit-Brisetuile and Mouginit-Grodard.

Mouginit-Tupin was a perfect incarnation of the pretentious and vain-glorious spirit that actuates the people of the country. He had taken to wife Mlle. Tupin, of the Anglecourts, a big, raw-boned, overbearing, solemn woman, with a face like a horse's, nearly a yard long, who laid claim to descent from an old family of the magistracy. The Mouginit-Tupins lived in the upper town in an old house which, in the eighteenth century, had been the property of a member of the *Chambre des Comptes*, and this former owner having neglected to remove his family portraits, they passed them off as those of their own ancestors. They had a stated day of the week for receiving — Sunday — toadied to the penniless members of the nobility, of whom the upper town was full, were invited to the entertainments at the Prefecture, and assumed airs of patronage toward the other members of the family, whom they never visited save on occasion of the great festivals.

Victor Mouginit, or Mouginit-Pechoin, represented the natives in their commercial and purely positive tendencies. He had married,

rather late in life, the daughter of old Pechoin, the wealthy druggist, whose business he had continued. He led a domestic life, confining himself strictly to his shop, where he busied himself with amassing a fortune, sou by sou, for Aristide, his only son. He never read anything except the *Codex* and the local newspaper, and professed a sovereign contempt for what he called "flights of imagination." He considered that the only persons entitled to consideration at his hands were men of business, whose lives were duly labeled and ticketed like the bottles on his shelves. He ate his meals, took his constitutional tramp and went to bed at hours that never varied, and it was a fixed principle with him never to give way to his feelings. The only thing that had power to arouse him from big phlegmatic taciturnity was the aristocratic assumption of his brother, Mouginot-Tupin. The arrogance and condescending airs with which his sister-in-law treated the other members of the family made a hard morsel for him to swallow; but, with an inconsistency in which he could see nothing unnatural, he affected the same contemptuous tone and assertion of superiority whenever his brother Scipio was in question.

This last-named personage, while still a young man, had espoused a Mlle. Brisetulle, who had died after two years of married life, leaving him a childless widower, whereon he turned his steps toward Paris, hoping to make a fortune there. Uncle Scipio had in his head the germ of that idiosyncratic Villottian im-

agination of which I have spoken elsewhere ; but in his case the seed took a wrong course in sprouting and the plant grew crooked ; he was of a flighty, irrepressible disposition, his teeming brain a storehouse of most magnificent schemes that invariably came to naught. Victor Mouginot, with his cruelly incisive common sense, summed him up as “a man who awakes every morning with a dream of making a million, and goes to bed every night a hundred francs out of pocket.” He would take up the most visionary and hopeless undertakings and throw all his heart and soul into them, and as soon as he tired of them would drop them with the same alacrity. No failure had power to quench his indefatigable ardor ; as soon as one of his hobbies had thrown him he got astride another and started off afresh with the same self-satisfied smile upon his face. He was crazy, people said, but if so it was after the fashion prevalent at Villotte ; his madness had in it an alloy of shrewdness and positivism that caused him always to alight on his feet and saved him from serious injury after his frequent tumbles. Hence it was that, although there were times when he declaimed loudly and bitterly against his “hard luck,” he never seemed to suffer greatly from it in his own person. Grandma Pechoin did not like him, and always spoke of him as a dangerous, selfish schemer, declaring that he fixed matters in such a way that others should pay the penalty of his follies. I am judging all these things now from the point of view of a man

who has learned the lesson of experience, but in the days of my boyhood I thought quite differently. It was my belief then that the family was too hard on Uncle Scipio, and having received more kicks and cuffs than half-pence from the Mouginot - Tupins and Mouginot-Pechoins, I cherished in my heart of hearts a secret admiration for that Scipio Mouginot who was so unlike his brothers, and whose romantic genius had seduced my childish imagination.

Reverting to myself and my affairs, I am the sole representative of the Mouginot-Grodards. My mother, a country lass who first saw the light in a town not far from Villotte, died in giving me birth, and my father, Captain Mouginot, was infatuated with the life of a soldier. That is an inclination frequently met with among the young men of this eastern province, which has been a nursery for the army from time immemorial. It was a love match on my father's part, and had not the approval of his family; he married a Mlle. Grodard of Tremont, and not long after my mother's death he also vanished from the scene, left dead on the field of Sidi-Ibrahim, leaving me for my entire inheritance his epaulettes and cross of the Legion. I thus became a charge upon my uncles, who were not any too well pleased with the obligation so summarily thrust on them; but as the ties of family are held in great respect among the Mouginots, notwithstanding their bickerings and dissensions, they made the best of a bad bargain and accepted the

captain's legacy with outward cheerfulness. It was agreed that Uncle Victor should act as my guardian and have the supervision of my education, and that each of the three brothers should contribute equally toward my maintenance. I was therefore quartered on the Mouginot-Pechoins, where I am now receiving my board and lodging, to say nothing of M. Dieudonne Jacobi's instruction in French and Latin. The Mouginot-Tupins pay their subvention with scrupulous punctuality, but the case is not the same with Uncle Scipio, who, as often as the semi-annual period rolls around, finds some plausible excuse for deferring payment, which gives rise to disagreeable scenes and affords Mme. Mouginot-Pechoin a text for reading me a humiliating sermon. The druggist's wife does not love me; she harbors a grudge against me—first, because I am a source of expense for which she receives no return, and next because I am brighter and handsomer than her own son Aristide.

The fact is, there is not the remotest resemblance between me and this fargon of virtue. I am as wide awake as he is dull and sleepy-headed, as dexterous and nimble as he is awkward. Again, I alone of all the family have brown hair and black eyes; the Mouginots, every one of them, are light-haired, with sallow complexions and small blue-gray eyes. I resemble my mother, so people tell me, who was a pretty woman, and by the kindly glances folks cast on me I can tell that my appearance is not repulsive to them. When my aunt

takes us to walk, I overhear the flattering comments of those we meet on my appearance and demeanor, which raises me to the seventh heaven of delight, but is very irritating to Mme. Mouginot. She indemnifies herself by airing her shrewish humor at my expense; she fretfully exclaims that I have nothing in common with the Mouginots, that I "take after" the Grodards, who are all black as crows. That does not trouble my peace of mind. What does vex and annoy me, though, is that, under pretense of correcting my vanity, she dresses me in the most ridiculous and frightful old duds. While Aristide struts about the town in smart new garments made by the tailor in the Place de la Prefecture, I am condemned to wear Uncle Victor's cast-offs. A seamstress by the day comes to the house and cuts out my jackets from my guardian's old coats, and not only are these indispensable articles a horrible fit, but they are threadbare when I put them on for the first time. It is to the deplorable tenuity of the cloth, worn thin by many years of constant usage, that I attribute the mishap of the boat and the accident to my trousers, and consequently, ever since the unmerited punishment inflicted by my aunt, I feel that I have a bone to pick with that vinegarish person and her hopeful son.

Grandma Pechoin has mended the rent in my nether integument most scientifically, but though her neat stitches are invisible to the naked eye the traces of the injury are only too

painfully apparent, and all summer long I shall be compelled to exhibit to an unfeeling world my trousers patched in the most conspicuous place. Dry bread and confinement I can bear philosophically enough ; it even affords me a certain degree of satisfaction to be a martyr in that small way, but to be made a laughing-stock, there's where the shoe pinches. Dress was always a weak point with me ; I have an invincible fondness for bright and pretty things. I would like to wear the glossiest of patent leather shoes, to have a trim brand-new jacket on my back, to sport an elegant velvet cap, like the sons of wealthy parents whom I encounter in my walks. So far are these aspirations from being realized that I go about with a sensation of being caparisoned like an organ-grinder's trick monkey, and my vanity suffers proportionately. When Sunday comes I slink shamefacedly into church and take possession of the remotest corner of the family bench, and when service is over I sneak along close to the walls, making myself as inconspicuous as possible ; I have a mental image of the eyes of the congregation fixed on the amplest portion of my person, of the by-passers whispering to one another : " He has a patch on the seat of his trousers ! "

This barefaced partiality in favor of my cousin is not limited to attire — it makes itself equally manifest at meal-times. The tidbits are for Aristide, anything is good enough for me. His mother invariably helps him to the breast of the chicken, and saves the drumstick

for me. If at dessert there is some specially luscious and tempting fruit, it is sure to find its way to Aristide's plate, and I can content myself as best I may with the overripe cherries and the gnarly pears. I am not a *gourmand*, but it stirs my bile to see him stuffing himself with all these good things right under my nose. I feel a sentiment of hatred toward him, like that which possessed Cain against his brother Abel, growing within my bosom. And then Abel was a handsome man, while Aristide has but little to recommend him in the way of beauty. A half-confessed desire to "get square" with him germinated in the deepest recesses of my heart, and gathers strength day by day; I cudgel my wits to invent some trick to play upon my cousin that shall be a partial atonement for the favors with which he is unjustly loaded. I might give him a sound thrashing: that would be easy enough to do, but it is not to be thought of; he would bellow like a bull-calf, and condign punishment would infallibly be meted out to me. No, I shall have to try to devise some artful scheme that shall leave me unwhipped of justice and be felt by him alone. The trouble is that Cousin Aristide's hide is thicker than a pachyderm's, and one knows not where to take him. By dint of reflection and careful watching, however, I succeed at last in finding his vulnerable spot.

My cousin is vain as a peacock; he is only too well aware of the irregularity of his features, and for that very reason resents the slightest allusion to them; any one wishing to arouse

him to fury has only to twit him with his proboscidian nose. I bear in mind this foible of his, and resolve to watch for a fitting opportunity when I may turn it to account to the confusion of the household Benjamin.

We are all seated around the table for the noonday meal. The soup having been removed, Adele brings in a dish of which I am particularly fond : small birds, larded and roasted in an iron pot, served on toast ; the steam from the toothsome mess fills the apartment, rising on the air with a delicious fragrance that brings the water to my mouth. Aunt Mouginot helps the company in succession, and deposits on Aristide's plate two birds and two slices of toast. I am the last one served, and my portion consists of two little mites of birds, *and no toast*. Aristide is happy ; he leers at me triumphantly through his white eyelashes, munching away ostentatiously at the golden-brown slices with which he is gorging himself at my expense. Outraged by the insult, I stare back at him in turn, then, taking my nose between the thumb and index finger, move my hand downward with a motion as of one caressing an appendage endlessly prolonged. Aristide catches my meaning and bites his lip in vexation, but his pride will not allow him to say anything for the reason that he is ashamed to attract attention to his deformity. I triumph in his silence ; emboldened by success, I continue my irritating pantomime with variations ; I play the part of one who by reason of the enormity of his nasal organ

cannot see the bottom of his plate, I pretend to put aside the imaginary proboscis with my hand. My cousin watches my movements with ill-suppressed wrath ; he turns green, he chokes with anger. My success inspires me to further efforts. Just at that moment Adele brings in the second course and places it on the table : potatoes boiled in their jackets ; there is a basket filled with those long pinkish *Dutchmen* that go by the name of *becs de cane* among us. As soon as I am served I give a slight cough in Aristide's direction ; he raises his eyes in blissful innocence just in time to see me applying to my nose the most preposterous of the misshapen tubers. He is unable longer to restrain himself, and his wrath explodes :

“Mamma, mamma !” he cries, “Jacques is making fun of me !”

My aunt turns her head and eyes me sternly.

“What is it now ?” she demands.

“Did any one ever hear the like !” I protest with wide-eyed astonishment. “I was just skinning my potato—”

“Come, there, let us have peace !” growls Uncle Victor.

Tranquillity is restored. A couple of minutes later, however, I again take up a potato, and, tipping a wink at Aristide, apply it to the end of my nose.

“Mamma !” again yelps my cousin in a fury.

Aunt Mouginot has been watching me with her sharp little eyes from out the folds of her shawl, arranged about her head so as to give

somewhat the effect of the hood of a doctor's gig, and sees through the meaning of my pantomime. Her heavy hand descends upon my face with a resounding smack.

"Take that, you little scamp!" she vociferates. "I'll teach you to persecute your cousin!"

"What has he been doing?" Grandma Pechoin wonderingly asks.

I am well aware that I got no more than I deserved, but none the less I attempt to carry the matter off with a bold face.

"Who, I? I have not been doing anything. I was eating my potato."

"Story teller—I saw you; you have been trying my patience for the last fifteen minutes. That boy is just as bad as he can be; he is entirely destitute of moral sense. He was ridiculing my poor Aristide's nose."

"That is very wrong, that is!" said kind old Grandma Pechoin, giving me a reproachful look.

"Yes, that is the mark of a bad disposition," chimes in Lawyer Jacobi, delighted with the chance of interpolating a harangue; "it shows a want of Christian charity and a low propensity to caricature. And then, too, a boy who thinks for himself will not let his mind be influenced by mere external defects of face or figure; the main thing is to have, not a handsome nose, but a beautiful soul. What matters it if the outer hull be rough provided the nut within be sweet and sound?"

Every one is against me. Aristide, cheered

and comforted in soul by the satisfaction derived from my disgrace and punishment, as well as by a double ration of dessert—my portion having been taken from me and added to his by Mme. Mouginot—has recovered his serenity and now has an opportunity to tantalize me in turn, which he does by displaying conspicuously before my eyes the juicy apricot tart that he devours with provoking deliberateness.

“The moral of all this,” succinctly observes Victor Mouginot as he takes little sips from his glass of unmixed wine, “is that cross dogs must be kept tied. Home education for boys going on eleven is too enervating; they must be taught to rough it a little. As soon as the holidays are ended I will put that rascal yonder to school at Pestel’s. The regimen there will also be beneficial to Aristide, who is getting to be too much of a milksop.”

“What!” Mme. Mouginot interrupts in alarm, “you don’t mean to say that you will turn our child over to strangers?”

“Above all, I want to be allowed to eat my dinner in peace,” the druggist authoritatively rejoins. “In two weeks they shall be entered at Pestel’s, both of them. I have said it!”

CHAPTER III.

THE house that sheltered the Pestel school has long since disappeared to make room for other buildings, but every detail of its topogra-

phy remains stamped upon my memory as vividly as if it were a thing of yesterday. I mind me of the weather-worn walls fronting on the street, where the master had his apartments and where were the refectory and dormitories; then came the rectangular courtyard unevenly paved with cobble-stones, the miniature garden with its iron railing, and, in one corner, a solitary venerable pine tree, in the bark of which we used to make incisions and gather the exuding resinous tears for the sake of the aromatic odor they afforded when burned. On the left a short flight of steps leads upward to a great room with white-washed walls and windows opening on the court. That is the principal classroom, and there I make my appearance one morning in October, accompanied by my cousin Aristide. The apartment is divided into two apparently equal portions by the stove and the raised platform on which M. Pestel is enthroned, a tall, spare man, with gray side-whiskers, receding forehead and a forbidden scar on the upper lip. He came from the Limousin originally, and is married to a little, bustling, scolding woman of Villotte, so lean that she is not much more than a bag of bones, who has charge of the primary class, into which Aristide, my junior by a year, has gravitated. I, thanks to my eleven years, am placed in the second division, where I find myself in the company of boys of fourteen and fifteen. The attendance is composed mainly of shopkeepers' sons and country lads, whom their parents send to Pes-

tel's because the expense is less there than at the college. The prospectus announces that pupils are prepared for classical studies, but the branches principally taught are French, history and mathematics. The first thing to occupy us in the morning is dictation, then M. Pestel mounts his platform, and stationing himself before the blackboard, chalk in hand, proceeds to elucidate the theory of addition for our benefit. With the drowsy purring of the stove for an accompaniment he solemnly informs us in his loud, spluttering voice: "I first add the column of units, I borrow one from that column, equal to ten, and carry it to the column of tens—" I fail to see the why and wherefore of all this borrowing and lending; when we come to the column of hundreds I cease to follow M. Pestel's explanations and my thoughts turn to other matters.

At noon the bell rings for dinner, which my cousin and I, being partial boarders, eat with the rest in the refectory; then until two o'clock we are given an opportunity to stretch our legs in the court, where we cut "slides" in the hard-frozen snow. After that exercises in grammar and arithmetic consume the time until four o'clock, to be resumed once more from five to seven. Then we are dismissed for the day. By that time it is quite dark, the cold stings and pinches, and the northwind rattles the old-fashioned street-lamps at the corners. It is with a sensation almost pleasurable that I come home to the pharmacy and take my place at table beside stern Mme.

Mouginot. But the next morning, at sharp half-past seven, I have to swallow down my bowl of hot milk in the kitchen and then struggle through snow or rain to Pestel's and battle with wearisome questions in arithmetic.

Under the dire stress of multiplication and division my head seems as if it would burst. Those complexities are as nothing, however, compared with problems. "Two streams discharge simultaneously into a basin having a capacity of twenty quarts ; the first stream has a flow of one quart, the second of two quarts per hour. Question : What length of time will the two streams require to fill the basin ?" The problem seems to me unsolvable, and rack my brain as I may, I never succeed in filling that confounded basin. My neighbor is a carrot-headed, unkempt, sly-faced boy of fourteen, with eyes that look two ways for Sunday, which has procured for him the sobriquet of *Guigne-a-Gouche*. His real name is Lechaudel, and his father is a carpenter in the Rue du Coq. Lechaudel, alias *Guigne-a-Gouche*, does not seem to let the mystery of the basin interfere with his peace of mind. On the other hand, he is rich in talents that arouse in me the profoundest admiration. With the assistance of a bit of string which he holds in his two hands, having first knotted the ends together, he executes a series of most entertaining performances : the saw, the fish, the cat's cradle, etc. Then, too, with a penknife and a sheet of stiff drawing-paper he cuts out fly-traps, with practicable doors and windows, which gives

me a high opinion of his ability. With a view to initiation into the mysteries of the string and the manufacture of fly-traps, I treat him very obsequiously and surrender on his demand the little delicacies of my lunch-basket. Under his instruction I devote the hours set apart each week to the practice of composition to perfecting myself in these useful arts; I acquire a tolerable degree of skill in the end, but my exercises suffer, and when Saturday night comes I am at the foot of my class and have an abominable report to carry home.

Oh, the dread terrors of those Saturday evenings, when I have to go home to Uncle Mougnot, bearing a report conceived invariably in these terms: "Conduct, disorderly; application, only fair; arithmetic, very bad—"! Aristide's notes, on the other hand, are excellent. He never stirs from his bench, his writing is like copper plate, at figures he is a youthful prodigy. We have no more than taken our seats at table than Uncle Victor calls for our reports; when he comes to mine he reads it aloud, taking pains to enunciate distinctly every word, then folds the sheet and lays it on the table, observing phlegmatically:

"Just as I have said all along—he will be a dunce!"

"Oh, my poor child," says Grandma Pechoin, gently reproachful, "why won't you apply yourself? Follow Aristide's example; he is not so old as you!"

"That boy," M. Dieudonne declares with an oracular air, "that boy is the personification of

levity. His mind has the wings of a butterfly."

"Pay no attention to him," my aunt snappishly rejoins, "he does it just on purpose to annoy us. He has an ugly disposition. You get no dessert to-night, sir!"

These hebdomodal bulletins spoil my Sundays for me. Occasionally a better impulse seizes me, and I make heroic resolutions. I promise mentally that I will follow Grandma Pechoin's advice and apply myself to my studies. But my ill-luck steps in and has something to say. As fate will have it, the problem that day is even more thickly beset with difficulties than usual. While the dictation is in progress Guigne-a-Gouche distracts my attention with his grimaces and monkey tricks, and makes me drop words; the consequence is that when Saturday night comes round again my report is more uncompromisingly bad than ever. Then I have not courage to go home and allow Aristide to return without me; I roam aimlessly about the streets, where the biting wind chills me to the marrow. I stop mechanically and gaze with unseeing eyes at the contents of the shop-windows. It is not until I have passed to and fro before the shop a dozen times that I muster courage to cross the threshold. Through the plate-glass window of the shop-front I can catch glimpses of the brightly lighted dining-room, I can discern the shadowy forms of the inmates as they raise to their lips the contents of the smoking dishes. At last, freezing and almost dead with hunger, I give the door a timid push

and enter. The little bell tinkles, and the sound finds an echo in my brain and in my stomach. A face appears at the *vasistas* — a voice exclaims : “ Here he is ! ” while I slink around to my seat with a hang-dog air. Aristide has made haste to tell all he knew, and the story of my discomfiture is public property.

“ Where have you been, vagabond ? ” demands Aunt Mouginot.

“ Where is your report ? ” asks in the same breath Victor Mouginot, fixing on me his stony eyes.

With mingled shame and terror I hand him the envelope. Sarcasms and cuffs are showered on me ; even now a chill runs down my back as I recall the scene ; I think I can hear my uncle’s harsh and unsympathetic voice repeating :

“ He will be a dunce ! ”

Through my boyish cares and troubles, however, the winter glided away, as the running stream finds its way among the piles of a bridge. The young shoots of the lindens are beginning to take on ruddy hues, there are cowslips in bloom in the beds of old Pestel’s garden, and from our benches in the school-room we can hear the blackbirds whistling among the budding lilacs. The approach of the month of May brings with it one of my most enjoyable pleasures : our Thursday outings among the woods. In the plain of Veel, on the border of the Petit-Jure, the Mouginot-Pechoins own a large rectangular piece of ground, bordered by coppices. The property was the scene of one of Scipio Mouginot’s

earliest enterprises. In those remote days Uncle Victor, not having as yet lost faith in Scipio's genius, had allowed himself to be persuaded by the latter into undertaking the culture of silk-worms and establishing a hatchery at Villotte. This bit of land was bought on joint account and planted with white mulberry trees.

At the present day the mulberry trees still throw up an occasional spindling shoot in the clayey soil of the plain and lead a precarious existence, but the hatchery has long since gone to ruin amid the jeers and laughter of the good people of Villotte. Vegetation is backward in this eastern portion of French territory, and the worms would insist on leaving their cocoons before the trees were ready to furnish them with subsistence, so that they died of starvation and the venture proved a lamentable failure. The druggist took possession of the land and transformed it into an orchard; he built a hut on the premises from the material of the ruined hatchery, and also engineered a sort of leafy bower, or summer-house, where we come out to take dinner and spend the afternoon in summer-time.

Promptly at one o'clock on these occasions the saddle is clapped on Cadet, an extremely sagacious little donkey, to whom is accorded the honor of bearing Mme. Mouginot and her fortunes. Adele fastens the basket containing the eatables to the crupper, my aunt seats herself in state on the roomy saddle, and off we go, M. Dieudonne leading Cadet by the bridle,

Aristide and I bringing up the rear. Traversing the Faubourg of Veel, where the weavers' looms maintain a clatter sufficient to wake the dead, we enter the Chalaide, a hollow road between two high wooded banks where the sun strikes vertically upon the green umbrella that Aunt Mouginot holds undeviatingly erect above her head. Climbing slowly upward, we reach the summit of the hill, the broad level where, amid the tender green of the vines and the grayish foliage of pollard willows, a few red-roofed peasants' cottages are nestled. Before us lies the plain with its uncultivated, undulating stretches covered with a promising crop of bowlders, with its fields of rippling wheat, and beyond, on the horizon, its encircling wall of forest; here is the "property" with its newly planted plum trees and its thin row of mulberry trees that Aunt Mouginot can never look at without a sigh, and her little hut of rough stone, from the chimney of which a thread of blue smoke is already rising on the air.

Grandma Pechoin, more active than her daughter, has gone on ahead with old Adele, and they have lighted a fire of brush which, when it has settled down into a bed of live coals, will serve to roast *a la ficelle* the leg of mutton from which we are to make our dinner. Cadet is relieved of his saddle and housed under the shed; then for a time we stroll up and down the central alley, along each side of which is a border of strawberry plants. M. Dieudonne, who goes off into ecstasies of admiration whenever he beholds a blade of grass and sees an in-

tention in everything, commences a discourse in which he commends the foresight of nature in making moles blind in order that they shall not leave their underground retreats. Grandma Pechoin cuts him short with scant ceremony in order to get up a game of loto. Aristide and I are permitted to take a hand, but we are informed that if we win it is not to count, and that we are only admitted to make up the game. That fashion of interesting us in the sport seems to me too utterly absurd, so I behave as badly as I possibly can, and succeed in getting myself eliminated from the game. Then I slip away and make for the wood, in the depths of which I bury myself with supreme content.

This woodland vagabondizing affords me more real pleasure than anything else in my weekly holidays. The silence of the forest has no terrors for me, and I never find the time hang heavy on my hands. I people the thickets with unsubstantial beings, and hold imaginary conversations with them ; I gather flowers, I investigate the properties of each new plant I meet, I spend hours watching the busy ants bustling about the entrance to their subterranean dwelling. It is a pleasure to me to lose myself in the thickest of the wood and unexpectedly come out upon the lonely and mysterious plain.

Far in the distance, beyond the billowing wheatfields, I discern a belt of vaporous forest, and I make believe to myself that I am approaching unknown countries, lands of faëry, to which I give fantastic names. I rack my

brain to invent perilous adventures of which I am the hero, and sometimes my figments of the imagination assume such an air of realism that I feel a delicious shudder stealing over me, while I keep my eyes fixed on the plain, over which the larks, lost in the depths of air, are warbling unseen, like an enchanted orchestra. Sometimes I lure Aristide on to accompany me by assuring him that I know where there is a mulberry tree whose fruit is fit to eat, and I try to make him a sharer in my romantic imaginings.

“Look there,” I say to him, “beyond that great wood that you see yonder is a city of giants; and you see that strip of blue away in the distance? That is the sea—”

But Aristide is as prosaic and matter-of-fact as a little wizened old man; it is no pleasure to invent fairy-tales for his benefit. He gives a shrug of the shoulders, and with a sneering expression that reminds me of his mother exclaims:

“Oh, come now, what’s that you’re giving me? Those are the woods of Combles, and that strip of blue down yonder is the Argonne. Let’s be getting back; I’m hungry as a bear.”

We shape our course for the “property,” and arrive in safety. The dinner is served in the summer-house, where the leg of mutton, done to a turn, diffuses a most delicious odor. Uncle Victor rolls back his sleeves and carves it in his methodical manner, generously apportioning to me the outside cut, while the ten-

derest and juiciest slice is reserved for "poor Aristide." We are still lingering over our desert when the twilight shadows begin to add their mysterious charm to the surrounding woods and the north-star appears, a glittering point, in the heavens where the blue is yielding to tints of green. We commence our preparations for the return. Mme. Mouginot, assisted by the ever-assiduous Jacobi, climbs clumsily to her seat of honor on Cadet's back, and as Aristide complains that his shoes hurt him, he is accorded the privilege of sprawling beside his mother on the saddle. As for the rest of us, we make our way down the hill on foot; Lawyer Dieudonne lends a supporting arm to Grandma Pechoin, Uncle Victor leads the donkey by the bridle, and I, bringing up the rear of the procession in solitary state, hang back to watch the moon, just beginning to peep above the trees that border the roadside. Buzzing beetles wing their way past me with a hurried air of businesslike messengers from the world of spirits, moths brush my cheek with their downy wings; from among the undergrowth of vines and brambles that lines the bank, the silvery bells of the crickets keep up a faint, incessant tinkling, and I again allow myself to be borne away on the wings of imagination, but just as I have come to the most thrilling part of my adventure I am brutally summoned back to earth again.

"Moon-gazing, hey?" growls Uncle Victor. "Come along, you dawdler, or I'll see if I can't find a way to put a little life into you!"

By the time the household gets home it is generally in a pretty cross and ill-natured frame of mind : aunt has taken cold and sees an attack of neuralgia impending for the morrow ; Aristide, soothed by the donkey's easy gait, has let himself drop off into slumber and squalls on being awakened suddenly ; M. Dieu-donne is afflicted by his corns. Alone, among them all I have no fault to find with my day's outing. I throw myself on my little bed and sink peacefully off into a refreshing sleep, with the music of the larks still ringing in my ears, the misty blue of my distant fairyland still present before my eyes. But the next morning the door of old Pestel's school will yawn for me again. I must go back and commence anew my everlasting treadmill round of grammar, arithmetic and history. The intervening schooldays that lie between one Thursday and its successor seem terribly long and barren to me.

M. Pestel is explaining the theory of decimal fractions to us one morning, mounted on his platform, his long, snuff-colored frock-coat flapping about his calves, his bald head and prominent beak giving the general effect of a bird of prey as they are outlined against the blackboard. The boys on the front rows of benches crane their necks and follow the master's demonstrations on the board with a show of attention ; but Lechaudel and I, from our places on the fourth bench where we are sheltered behind a triple row of backs, pay but scant heed to what is going on before us. Guigne-a-Gouche,

whose ingenuity is never at fault to discover means whereby to alleviate the tedium of school, has cut in the table a hole which opens into the drawer beneath where each boy keeps his books and slate, and through this hole he drops pennies into the interior of the drawer, which he then opens to see whether they have come down *head or tail*.

“Have you any money about you?” he asks me in a whisper.

I have six sous, which I take from my pocket and exhibit to him; his squinting eyes glitter at sight of the coin of the realm.

“Do you want to play?” he continues; “it’s great fun. I drop one of your sous into the drawer; if it comes up tails, you win and I give you one of mine; if it is heads, then I take your sou.”

I agreed to the proposal and give him one of my coppers, a handsome, bright-yellow sou bearing the effigy of Louis XVI. The coin disappears in the hole and the drawer is opened.

“It’s a head!” whispers Guigne-a-Gouche; “I’ve won. Come, do you want your revenge?”

As innocent as a new-born babe, I hazard another sou and anxiously await the opening of the drawer.

“Heads again!” says my companion with a hypocritical sigh. “You are having bad luck.”

But casting a hurried glance of investigation at the internal arrangement of the drawer, I see that my tricky friend has placed a slip of

cardboard so that the coins shall slide down it and come up head or tail as he may will. I fire up and angrily protest :

“ You cheated ! give me back my money.”

And at the same time I stretch forth my hand to seize the pennies in the drawer, which Lechaudel attempts to close with a vicious shove. A brief and voiceless struggle ensues ; I direct a shower of kicks at Guigne-a-Gouche's shins, and he responds with a blow. Every eye is turned on us, but our passions are aroused to such a pitch that we keep on pummeling each other until Pestel interferes and parts us with a couple of cuffs that are audible throughout the room.

“ You ill-conditioned cubs !” he roars, “ do you know no better than to fight like a pair of coal-heavers ? If you don't, I'll teach you !”

His attention is attracted to the open drawer, where the sous lie scattered in confusion ; he grasps the situation and his face becomes livid.

“ So, then, this is how you pass your time while I am talking myself hoarse to try to teach you something !” he goes on. “ You convert my school into a gambling-house ! It is well ; you will spend Thursday afternoon in the school-room in close confinement.”

Whereupon he confiscates our pennies and leaves us, red as a couple of peonies, to reflect on our misadventure. Community of misfortune makes us kind once more, and Lechaudel, while repairing damages, murmurs :

“ Do you mean to come on Thursday ? I

know very well that I won't. I mean to take an airing that day."

I made no reply, but the thought that there is a possibility of escape from Pestel's sentence gradually takes root in my mind and grows there. It so happens that my aunt has arranged a picnic for that very Thursday; several friends of our acquaintance are to come with their children and enjoy an open-air dinner with us at the "property," and I know that there is to be a monster game of nine-holes. To be cut off from delights like these I feel would be a calamity beyond my powers of endurance, and as Lechaudel, my accomplice, does not intend to submit to confinement, I don't see why I should carry my heroism so far as to take my punishment alone. A consideration of two sous duly paid to Aristide secures his silence, and when Thursday comes, untormented by the faintest feeling of remorse, I fall into line behind little Cadet the donkey, who bears on his back Mme. Mouginot, flanked on each side by a huge hamper of provisions.

Oh, the exquisite delights of that Thursday thus ravished from the tyranny of old Pestel! The plain is flooded with brightest sunlight, and over the fields, redolent with the sweet breath of clover and sainfoin, brilliant-hued butterflies flutter in innumerable swarms. The woods are odorous, the wild cherry trees are red with fruit; several times do I score a hundred at nine-holes, and I win ten sous; the dinner is good and there is plenty of it, everybody is agreeable and good-humored, and the return

to Villotte is not made until it is too dark to see. But as the fete draws to an end a leaden sensation of dread and uneasiness takes possession of me and weighs me down, the burden of which grows heavier with every step I take toward home, and when I cross the threshold of the pharmacy I find that the load of remorse which I threw off so nonchalantly in the morning has at night resumed its old position on my shoulders. With a sad heart I take myself off to bed. I sleep badly, and wake up with a start in the darkness of the night to think with terror of what will happen on the morrow when I show myself at school. I could pray for an eternity of night. In the shadowy silence of our bedroom I listen for the tolling of the deep-mouthed bell that tells the hours.—Three o'clock!—Five hours more, and I shall know my fate.

I try to go to sleep so that I may think of it no more, but soon as I close my eyes I have a nightmare; my dream shows me old Pestel brandishing his ferule and darting angry glances toward my empty place out of his gray eyes with their bushy, bristling brows. I awake and spring up in bed. Already there are parallel bars of faint white light where the closed blinds are, and I hear the Angelus pealing from the belfries of the churches far and near. One more hour of respite—I bury my head beneath the bed-coverings and lie without motion until Aristide comes to summon me to breakfast. I shiver while I dress myself, although the weather is very warm. I force myself to swallow a cup of milk, at which my

stomach revolts; I sling my satchel across my back, and we are off.

“What are you going to say to old Pestel?” Aristide ill-naturedly asks.

My only answer is a shrug of the shoulders, but involuntarily my step becomes slower and heavier and I slink along the sidewalk much like a whipped cur sneaking homeward to his kennel with his tail between his legs.

Now we are before the entrance to the school. My heart is heavy as lead, and I am conscious of a sensation of icy cold between my shoulders. We cross the deserted court; we are late and the boys are all in their places. Aristide throws open the door and my ears are saluted by a confused sound of muffled voices, then every head is turned and every eye bent on me. Before I have advanced three steps Pestel, clothed in all his terrors, presents himself before me, close-buttoned in his long, tight-fitting coat, a ferocious scowl on his scarred lip.

“Ah, here you are at last, you young sinner!” he cries. “Why did you not come and submit yourself to arrest yesterday, as I bade you?”

I cast down my eyes and falteringly reply:

“I—I forgot it.”

“I see your memory is treacherous; so much the worse for you. I will not retain a pupil who is incorrigible, one who is constantly setting an example of evil to his companions. Go back to where you came from, infected member of the flock; you are expelled from school, and

your family shall be notified this very morning."

Pestel throws wide the door, and driving me before him, stands for a moment longer on the threshold, shaking his fist and shouting in a voice of thunder:

"Off with you! begone! Leave the premises—I expel you!"

CHAPTER IV.

ARISTIDE has been intrusted by Pestel with a note to M. Mouginot-Pechoin informing my guardian of my disgrace. When, after wandering all the morning about the city in a pitiable frame of mind, I at last return to my abode, my uncle wrathfully grasps me by the collar of my jacket, and without allowing a word to escape his pale, pinched lips shuts me in a disused workroom where I am to take my meals and whence I am not to stir until it comes time to go to bed. This enforced seclusion has lasted three weeks when, as I am whiling away the time one morning by opening and shutting the faucet of a pipe intended to supply water to a great copper kettle, the door of my prison flies back; but being deeply absorbed in my occupation, and deafened, moreover, by the reverberating roar and splash of the water in the hollow receptacle, I hear nothing. A sound thump on the back arouses me from my meditations, and turning, I behold before me the frigid face of my uncle Victor.

“You good-for-nothing!” he growls. Then laying his hands on my shoulders and shoving me toward the door: “Follow me!” he laconically orders.

What can he be going to do with me? We cross the courtyard, carpeted with aristolochias, we ascend the stairs, and to my intense stupefaction my uncle stops at the entrance to the drawing-room, an apartment that is never used except on rare and solemn occasions, three or four times a year; he turns the knob, and, taking me by the arm, introduces me, dumb with amazement, to the presence of five persons seated primly in a circle on the sofa and fauteuils of reseda-colored velvet. The blinds are thrown back as far as they will go, but notwithstanding the warmth of the sunshine out of doors, the long disused room, with its round marble-topped table, its waxed floor smooth and slippery as a mirror, its clock under glass and chandeliers done up in gauze, is damp and cold as a cellar and has a frosty, barnlike aspect. I gradually recover my faculties and am enabled to recognize the faces of the company.

Seated on the sofa, where she is least exposed to be contaminated by the contact of the others, is Mme. Nathalie Mouginot-Tupin, uncompromisingly stiff and erect, laced within an inch of her life and muffled in a red cashmere shawl with a figure of white palm-leaves; a green velvet bonnet surmounted by an ostrich feather of corresponding shade serves partially to conceal her long equine face, bordered by

corkscrew curls of an undecided yellowish hue and wearing a disdainfully compassionate smile. A few feet from her, perched on the edge of his fauteuil in an attitude expressive of great deference, is her husband, my uncle Mouginit-Tupin, a little man with a papier-mache complexion and an insignificant presence; his most remarkable attributes are his inordinately long nose, his trick of blinking his muddy eyes and the color of his scanty, yellow hair, plastered flat upon his cranium. Every now and then he steals a timid look toward his wife, then his trembling fingers go down into his coat pocket whence he extracts a small, round box, and the little man, stealthily opening the tortoise-shell receptacle, surreptitiously slips into his mouth a jujube lozenge that he may have something to comfort him and occupy his mind.

With her head enshrouded in her thickly wadded hood, and ensconced, moreover, in a fauteuil with side-pieces as a protection against neuralgia, my aunt Mouginit-Pechoin occupies a seat not far from her brother-in-law, at whose majestic better-half she furtively casts vinegarish looks. Behind the fauteuil with side-pieces stands M. Dieudonne Jacobi, erect and vigilant like a body-guard. There is still another person: a square-built, black-bearded, sunburnt man, with hair cut *en brosse*, who has thrown himself unceremoniously into an easy-chair and is tapping his crossed legs with the end of his stick; his attire is scrupulously neat, but one has only to look at its redundant material and antiquated cut to see that the wearer is a

countryman. He has bright black eyes, his gestures are brusque and impulsive, his face is a frank and honest one. I have seen him but twice in my life, and that was long ago, but I recognize in him M. Marcel Delorme, a first cousin of my mother, now holding the position of superintendent in the paper factory at Jeand'heurs.

Uncle Victor conducts me to the middle of the room, where I am exposed to a converging fire from the eyes of these five individuals; then he goes and posts himself with his back to the fireplace, pulls his cuffs down over his big knobby fists, and calling the attention of the assemblage to me, thus begins :

“The subject of discussion is before you ! It was to speak to you of this boy that I have put you to the trouble of coming here to-day. You are all relatives of his except Lawyer Jacobi, and him I have invited to be present in the capacity of counsel and friend of the family. This scapegrace has recently been expelled from his school ; in addition to that I believe there is not a single fault under the sun that he has not ; my patience is at an end, and before resorting to extreme measures I wish to take your opinion. You are the oldest,” he adds, turning to M. Mouginot-Tupin, “it is for you to speak first.”

At this interpellation the little man shifts nervously to and fro upon his chair, takes out his box and slips a lozenge into his mouth, and addressing me in a voice of pained reproach :

“How is this, Jacques,” says he, “your

master won't keep you in his school? At your age! It is disgraceful—"

"Palamede!" Mme. Mouginot-Tupin magisterially interrupts, "there is no use in preaching to your nephew. That is a duty that rightfully belongs to his guardian, who has had entire charge of his education. We have not been consulted, and, thank the Lord! can't be held responsible for the turn matters have taken."

"Do you mean by that to say we have not done our duty by the boy?" my aunt Mouginot-Pechoin acidulously interjects.

"I keep my opinions for myself, madame! Every one must stand or fall on his own merits."

"I do not flinch from my responsibility," Uncle Victor sulkily rejoins, "but it is to decide on what is to be done in the future, not to criticise what I have done in the past, that I have brought you together to-day. Pestel has expelled from his school this worthless vagabond, who misbehaves and will not apply himself to his studies. This being the case, I ask you if it is not better, for the child's own sake, that he should be put to learn a trade?"

"Indeed! That will reflect great honor on the family," Mme. Mouginot-Tupin ironically observes. "A Mouginot in mercantile business, that might possibly be endured; but a common laborer—what a come-down!"

"A merchant, madame, who earns his living by honest toil," retorts my aunt Victor, get-

ting on her high horse, "is every bit as good as a *reutier* who spends all his income, and more, too, in order to associate with his betters. Besides, I am not aware that the Tupins sprang from the brain of Jupiter."

"My father was a magistrate, madame!"

"Really?" replies the druggist's wife with a provoking affectation of surprise; "I had always supposed he was a clerk. Perhaps that is what people call the 'sitting magistracy'?"

"This is unendurable!" exclaims the descendant of the Tupins, pulling her red cashmere more closely about her shoulders. "You would not dare insult me in this way outside your own house—"

"Come, come, ladies," Cousin Delorme laughingly interrupts, "every honest means of gaining a livelihood is respectable, and men are to be judged only by their personal worth. My advice has not been asked so far, but I make bold to offer it in the hope that it will put an end to this discussion. It is too bad that the youngster doesn't take kindly to Latin, but we must not consider him a hopeless case on that account. What do you say to letting me have him? I will put him to school until he is fourteen, and then he can enter the factory as an apprentice."

"You would make a peasant of him," sneers Mme. Mouginot-Tupin. "That caps the climax."

While the discussion is going on I remain standing in the center of the group, a mat of

plaited straw beneath my feet. I find it bitterly mortifying to be dissected thus in presence of all these people, and my face is scarlet. In the midst of my confusion, however, I keep a watchful eye upon my judges, and criticise them with the merciless and irreverent acumen of youth. For the greater part of those who constitute the family council I entertain not the slightest respect. Uncle Mouginot-Tupin, absorbed in the mastication of his lozenge, appears to me no better than an idiot. His great hackney of a wife, with her red shawl fastened beneath the chin by an immense cameo brooch, makes me feel like laughing outright, and I could almost hug my aunt Victor for snubbing her as she did. The only one of them all who finds favor in my eyes is Cousin Delorme; nevertheless, I am not over well-pleased with his offer to take me with him to Jeand'heurs. In my little childish noddle, filled with glittering visions and dreams of glory, I believe that destiny has better things in store for me. The prospect of entering the paper factory as an apprentice seems to me almost like a disgrace, and I tremble at the thought that my uncle Victor may accept the superintendent's proposition.

Fortunately, I am destined to be more frightened than hurt; my guardian has really no great desire to part with me. He has made his calculations and is aware that should he turn me over to an outsider he will not only lose the contribution of the Mouginot-Tupins, but will also have to pay to M. De-

lorme his one-third share in the expense of my maintenance and education. From his old position in front of the fireplace he replies to the other's proposition with a gesture of dissent :

"No, Monsieur Delorme, the child was confided to my care, and I mean to keep him. If I have summoned you all to meet here to-day, it is that you may invest me with unlimited authority, for this young rascal must learn that he has got to walk straight and toe the mark like a soldier—"

"I have nothing to say against that," M. Delorme replies ; "I am myself somewhat of a stickler for discipline. But you have not told us what was the offense that led to his expulsion."

"He lied to us," explains Aunt Victor. "He was sentenced to be 'kept in,' and instead of submitting to his punishment he had the impudence to go with us to the woods and enjoy himself."

"That is not a hanging offense," the superintendent indulgently murmurs.

"In my time," slowly enunciates Uncle Mouginot-Tupin, twisting his face out of all human shape in his effort to keep the inevitable lozenge from slipping down his throat, "in my time boys were made to obey, and when they were punished they had to submit."

"And then, too," adds M. Dieudonne Jacobi in his very silkiest voice, "chastisement is not half so hard to bear if one will but kiss the rod."

"That's all very fine!" rejoins Cousin Delorme, shrugging his shoulders, a little contemptuously I thought; "but I wish I could see what you were like, you old fellows, when you were of the age of this little man. I have an idea that you were not saints and that, like myself, your conscience reproaches you with 'playing hookey' more than once."

"Those are nice things to say in the hearing of a child!" Aunt Victor objects, highly scandalized.

"Sir," Mouginot-Tupin sputters, indignantly, "I was never kept in, I would have you to know. I was always a good boy and obeyed my masters."

"So much the worse for you," is M. Delorme's rude reply. "Your model boys always turn out to be milksops when they reach manhood."

"Milksops!" Mme. Mouginot-Tupin is perfectly well satisfied in her own mind that the appellation suits her husband to a T, but she does not like to hear it from another's lips. She rises, drapes herself once again in her cashmere, and darting an imperious look at Mouginot-Tupin:

"Come, Palamede, let's be going!" she exclaims. "It is a little too much, to come here to be insulted by a nobody!"

The conversation threatens to take an acrimonious turn again; noses and chins are protruded in defiant attitudes and eyes seem to shoot poisoned darts. All at once, just as the storm is on the point of bursting, there is a

knock at the door, old Adele's face is visible for a moment, and she announces :

“ Mr. Scipio Mouginot ! ”

Various impressions, surprise, curiosity, apprehensions and contempt flit rapidly across the faces of the assemblage.

“ Yes, dear friends, it is I ! ” rings a voice like a clarion.

And the door opens wide to give passage to a man who will never see forty-five again, but who looks younger. He is attired in an elegant light-gray overcoat that is thrown open to disclose a dark frock buttoned across the chest, beneath which are nankeen trousers and gaiters of the same material. He bears erect his shapely, well-modeled head and clean-cut face indicative of intelligence : smiling, freshly-shaven lips, light-brown, curling side-whiskers, locks that are just beginning to be silvered here and there with gray. His blue eyes have an indescribable expression, at once bold, entreating and subtly seductive, that seems to magnetize one. In one hand he carries a tall pearl-gray hat of fashionable shape, in the other a morocco leather portfolio stuffed almost to bursting. He steps briskly forward and deposits hat and portfolio on the marble-topped table, and with arms outstretched toward the apparently not over-gratified Mouginot-Pechoin, exclaims :

“ Here, in my arms ! upon my heart ! ”

He embraces Uncle Victor, performs a pirouette and clasps to his bosom Mouginot-Tupin, who endeavors vainly to keep him off, and in

the struggle has a narrow escape from choking himself with his jujube. This performance is followed by another pirouette ; this time Scipio bows before the haughty representative of the Tupins, and gallantly imprints a kiss on the tips of her fingers ; after that comes Mme. Mouginot-Pechoin's turn, who receives a kiss on each cheek, and M. Delorme's, whose brown hand the newcomer seizes and shakes cordially.

I watch the scene with eyes as big as saucers, and cannot but admire the easy grace and perfect self-possession of this Scipio Mouginot, who has always to me appeared to be ill appreciated and whose providential appearance would seem to have in it something of the romantic. It was thus I had always beheld him in my dreams, thus I had imagined he would present himself before me, like a prince from fairyland.

"I am glad to see you all !" he continues, applying to his eyes a filmy cambric handkerchief edged with a deep orange-colored border, "so glad I cannot restrain my tears to be among my kin once more. I am just in from the Vosges, and could not pass through Villotte without stopping to embrace you all and make the acquaintance of my little nephews. Where are they ? Ah, here is one," says he, as his eyes light on me. "This must be Jacques ; I know him by his black eyes. How he has grown — what a handsome boy he is !"

"Evil weeds grow fast," Mme. Mouginot-Pechoin sarcastically interjects.

He pays no attention to her remark, but lifts me in his arms, dandling me and kissing

me on the cheeks. The rest of the company, as if dazed by the *aplomb* and buoyant spirits of this surprising man, stare at him in silence and hang back in an attitude of suspicion and distrust. At last he sets me down upon the floor, casts a rapid, sweeping glance about him and, noticing the hostile, glum expression on the faces of the assemblage, exclaims:

“*Ah ca!* what is the matter here? One would take you for a bench of judges just after passing sentence on a criminal, judging from your solemn faces.”

M. Dieudonne Jacobi takes it on him to reply. Hurt in his vanity not to have had his share of the accolades distributed by the newcomer, he desires to attract his attention and show that he, Jacobi, is not a nobody. With a deprecating droop of the shoulders and on his lips a propitiatory smile broad as a barn door:

“Monsieur,” he says, “your words are truer than you thought for when you uttered them; this is in very truth a family council, convened to deal with your nephew’s case.”

“My nephew’s case?” my uncle Scipio echoes with a look of pained astonishment. “Poor boy, what crime has he committed?”

“He has been insubordinate, as usual,” Mme. Mouginot-Pechoin replies, “and his teacher expelled him from the school.”

Scipio Mouginot endeavors, with ill success, to assume an expression of severity; a smile peeps out from beneath his frown.

“Hum!” he murmurs, “that is bad. But after all, there is mercy for the sinner; it

would grieve me deeply that the pleasure of seeing you all again after my long absence should be marred by this little fellow's tears. This day ought to be distinguished by a white mark. Come, my dear friends, I hope that in return for the good news I bring you you will grant me Jacques's pardon."

"What is your good news?" Uncle Victor gruffly asks.

"News of an invention of which the value is simply inestimable, an invention that is destined to be more prolific of wealth than a California placer. I have struck the vein at last!"

"What is it all about, what does he mean by his vein?" little Mouginot-Tupin asks in his idiotic way.

"I have succeeded in inventing," Uncle Scipio grandiloquently continues, "I have succeeded in inventing a process for the manufacture of a new cloth for uniforming the army, a strong, reliable cloth that will never wear out, that will be cool in summer and warm in winter; a hygienic cloth that will assure the health of the soldier, and of which the cost of manufacture is marvelously cheap. My invention will be a benefit to the race and to the country; it is destined to revolutionize the trade in army cloths. I have taken out a patent; it is here," he exclaims, dramatically tapping on the cover of his morocco portfolio. "The Minister of War has given me assurances of his good-will, and I have at my back capitalists who are not to be daunted by any expenditure of money. We have organized a company with a capital

of a million, represented by two thousand shares of five hundred francs each; they have nearly all been taken up and are already quoted at a premium on the Bourse. So, my friends, you see there is reason why we should rejoice and be merry and kill the fatted calf. These are not idle words, they are accomplished facts. I have just returned from the Vosges, where I have been buying a factory for the treatment of the raw material and the fabrication of our goods. Within a month we shall be receiving orders from the government, and before the year is out we shall be taking in money by millions. I desired that you, my relatives and friends, should be first to hear of my great success, and I congratulate myself the more on my good fortune that it will permit me, immediately on my return to Paris, to fully reimburse my brother Victor for all the advances he has made on my account."

These last words have the effect of smoothing the wrinkles from my uncle Victor's brow. As for me, I am completely under the spell; my gaze dwells with religious awe on the countenance of this persuasive millionaire, whose every word as it drops from his lips seems to me like a glittering gold coin fresh from the mint. The others of the assemblage, too, I can see are not far from sharing my sentiments; Uncle Scipio's fecundity has produced a sudden revulsion. The patent, the assurances of the Minister, the purchase of the factory in the Vosges, the stock quoted above par — all these things have a substantial, truthful, offi-

cial air about them which makes a very decided impression on these worthy bourgeois of Villette, accustomed as they are to regard any one having an income of five thousand francs as a Croesus. Mme. Mouginot-Tupin begins to think that Scipio has a "very distinguished air"; her husband appears to have had the breath knocked out of him by the unusual torrent of eloquence, and fruitlessly racks his brain to discover what relation there can be between army cloth and that *vein* which his brother asserts he has struck. M. Dieudonne Jacobi is completely subjugated by the high-sounding phrases of the Parisian's harangue. M. Delorme and my aunt Mouginot-Pechoin are the only ones who remain obdurate to the charm. Uncle Scipio, seeing that the lady makes no offer to open her pursed-up mouth, turns to her with an insinuating smile :

"I have something for you here, my sister," says he.

He dives down into the pocket of his overcoat and brings up a pretty little leather-covered box in which, upon his opening it, I behold various small implements of gleaming steel : scissors, thimble, bodkin, etc.

"Until I can give you something more worthy of you," he goes on, "permit me to offer you a souvenir of Plombieres. A workbox. It could not be placed in better hands than those of a woman who loves her home and stands in my eyes as the representative of all the domestic virtues."

Aunt Victor at last condescends to smile.

Ungraciously muttering her thanks, she pockets the box, and it is evident that she is not displeased with the attention.

"You won't refuse me Jacques's pardon," Scipio says, insistently, and bows.

"It is no affair of mine," she sourly answers ; "address yourself to your brother."

Uncle Victor merely shrugs his shoulders.

"But where is my nephew Aristide?" Uncle Scipio inquires with newly awakened interest.

"At school. He works ; he is a comfort to us, that one is !" my aunt replies.

"He won't come home until evening," adds Uncle Victor. "Come and take dinner with us, and you will see him."

"I will accept your invitation, but on condition that you breakfast with me at the Hotel du Cygne, where I am staying, and bring Jacques with you. I left a little girl at the hotel with whom I hope my nephews will make friends."

"A little girl !" cries Uncle Victor, his face suddenly clouding over again ; "do you mean to say you have a little girl now?"

"She is not mine ; she is the daughter of one of our directors. The doctors ordered her away to the mountains for her health and I am bringing her home to her parents."

The explanation restores the druggist's equanimity. He in no wise objects to a good breakfast, being a little of a *gourmet*, especially when he does not have to put his hand in his pocket to pay for it. After a good many ungracious objections he finally consents to honor

the feast with his presence and bring me with him.

“And you, too, Palamede?” says Uncle Scipio, turning to Mouginot-Tupin; “you are with us, aren’t you?”

Palamede would accept with alacrity if left to himself, but Mme. Mouginot, *nee* Tupin, has other views.

“Thank you, Monsieur Scipio,” she dryly answers, “Palamede is compelled to diet and never eats outside his own house.”

Scipio Mouginot smiles, gathers up his portfolio and his pearl-gray hat, salutes the ladies in gallant style, bows rather stiffly to M. Delorme and Lawyer Jacobi, and then the three of us make our way downstairs to the pharmacy, where Uncle Victor gives his apprentice an apparently interminable string of directions. At last we are outside upon the street; I draw a deep breath of relief to have got off so easily. I bless kind Providence for the opportune intervention of the uncle from Paris. I lengthen my stride to suit the step of the two brothers, and with pleasant anticipations of what is before me pursue my way toward the Hotel du Cygne, whose white façade shines like a beacon of hospitality in the bright sunshine.

CHAPTER V.

MATTERS in themselves comparatively unimportant often leave a wonderfully vivid impression on the juvenile mind; a fortuitous, entirely

trivial circumstance will make a mark there that shall be indelible through a long course of years, while later in life, when manhood is reached, events of far greater moment leave barely a trace behind them. It is thus that my memory retains every slightest detail of that breakfast of which I partook at the Hotel du Cygne in company with my two uncles. I have a distinct vision of the great dining-room on the ground floor, with its two windows looking on the street, its wall-paper in imitation of oaken wainscoting, the earthenware stove in its recess, the long table d'hôte garnished with rows of plates, on which pyramids of fruit alternate with artificial flowers in pots. By one of the corner windows is a round table which, by Uncle Scipio's direction, has been set for a party of four, and on each plate is an immaculately white napkin artistically folded to represent a bishop's miter. Lurking in the folds of each napkin rests a little roll with appetizingly glazed and golden crust; such rolls are never seen on Aunt Mougnot's table. The display is a delight to the eye, and is alluringly suggestive of ideas of good cheer. Uncle Scipio excuses himself for a moment and returns leading by the hand a little maid of ten, beholding whom I am at once thrown into a religious fervor of admiration.

"This is my young friend Alice," he says to Uncle Victor. Then, turning to me, he adds: "I hope that you two will be good friends, Jacques. Come, give her a kiss!"

M. Victor Mougnot restricts himself to a

muttered "Good-morning, child!" of which the intonation is not any too amiable. As for me, I step forward timidly, devoutly, toward the little girl, my eyes distended wide with wonder; she seems too ethereal to be touched by mortal hands, and I barely touch my lips to her satiny cheek, so superior in elegance and refinement does this delicate creature appear to the children of my acquaintance.

The truth of the matter is that she has the air of a little princess, has Alice, with her skirt of Scotch plaid and corsage of black velvet bands arranged crosswise over a white chemisette, her slender ankles incased in knee-high gaiters of brown cloth, her small feet shod with the most ravishing *boltines* of bronze kid! Her slenderness makes her appear taller than she is; her skin is very white—too white, indeed—and she has great brown eyes and an opulence of wavy black hair that tumbles, torrent-fashion, down upon her shoulders. The darkness of the eyes in their setting of bluish sclerotica, the inky blackness of the billowy hair, serve still further to accentuate the pallor of her complexion. Added to all this, she has the pretty ways and charming self-possession of a young lady grown; and further, a gravity that disconcerts me. She is given a seat at my side. A waiter in black dress-coat and white tie brings in the dishes and ministers in silence to our wants. He places before us scrambled eggs, trout *au court boullion* and beefsteak *aux pommes soufflées*, good things that are seen but seldom on the Mougnot-Pechoin's table; but for all that, I

pay not the slightest attention to what I am eating, so absorbed am I in watching the pretty way little Alice has of handling her knife and fork. From time to time she casts a sidelong glance at me from the corner of her eye, and a faint smile plays over her lips as she detects me in some breach of etiquette. Faithful to the traditions of the Mouginot family, I am sawing away industriously with my knife at my crusty roll; suddenly, Alice speaks up in her distinct and rather imperious voice:

“That’s not the way; break the bread with your fingers; don’t cut it!”

The blood rushes to my face and the faculty of speech seems to have left me. Coming from any one else I should receive such a humiliating reproof with very bad grace; but from the lips of the little Parisienne, the remark delights me greatly. I am pleased that my pretty neighbor honors me and my doings with her attention; I put aside the offending knife and servilely imitate the manner of breaking bread that she inculcates. My docility seems to afford her satisfaction, for she smiles on me indulgently and condescends to inaugurate a conversation.

“Is that your father?” she whispers, “that wall-eyed gentleman who looks this way occasionally?”

M. Victor Mouginot is engaged in an animated conversation with his brother, who is demonstrating with great abundance of detail the superiority of his hygienic and patriotic invention, so that he does not hear what is being

said across the table ; and fortunate it is that he does not, for otherwise he would not be deeply flattered by the outspoken comment on his visual organs made by my little neighbor, to whom I reply beneath my breath :

“ No, that is my cousin Aristide’s father ; he is my uncle.”

“ Ah ! and your father, where is he ? ”

“ He is dead ; and so is my mother also.”

“ My father is dead, too ; but I have mamma still. We live together, and she thinks the world of me.”

“ Do you live away off there among the Vosges ? ”

“ Oh, no—I live in Paris. I have been visiting an aunt at Gerardiner, to breathe the air of the pine forests ; I enjoyed myself pretty well there, because there are lots of flowers in the woods, but it is not Paris all the same. I shall be good and glad to be at home again ! ”

“ Do children go to school at Paris ? ”

“ Yes, other children ; but I don’t. Mamma keeps me at home because I am not very well, don’t you see. She gives me my lessons and corrects my exercises.”

“ Do you have to study arithmetic ? ”

“ Certainly ; and a great many other things.”

“ Do you know division ? ”

“ Why, yes. Is that so very surprising ? ” she answered, with a laugh.

I give her a look of envy and admiration, then I add : “ Perhaps you have had the problem of the basin to do ? ”

“ I think not. Besides, I am not very strong

in figures. What I like best is history—Louis XIV., Anne of Austria, Mazarin, the Musketeers. I saw the ‘Three Musketeers’ once, at the Porte-Saint-Martin; we go there once in a while of a Sunday with mother. Do you ever go to the theater?”

“What, I? Never!”

The mere thought of hearing her ask such a question in presence of Aunt Mouginot gives me a creepy sensation. Mme. Victor looks on “play actors” as people separated hopelessly from the elect, and considers the theater a place of perdition. Still, I cannot bear to let my new friend think that I inhabit a country of savages, and I add, with somewhat of an ostentatious air:

“Our folks don’t go. But there is a theater at Villotte, and a company that plays in it at carnival-time and at the Fodre de Mai.”

My little friend turns up her pretty nose disdainfully and replies:

“Oh, yes; country actors, I suppose. At Paris we have Frederick Lemaitre, Lacrosoniere—and Melingue! Oh! how I wish you could see Melingue in ‘La Jeunesse des Mousquetaires!’”

Then, with a fire and a preciseness of detail that fill me with amazement, she proceeds to give me an idea of the play and its characters; D’Artagnan, Athos, Porthos and Mordaunt, and the death of Charles I., and the blowing up of the ship. She describes the scenery, the costumes, repeats bits of the dialogue for my benefit, and my admiration begins to transcend the

bounds of reason for this ten-year-old child who is so pretty, so learned, so bright and animated ; who talks with such careless indifference of the difficulties of division, and goes with her mother to the play ! The music of her voice, the expression of her brown eyes and the wonderful mobility of her features inspire me in succession with a series of rapturous ecstasies. She is quick to notice my admiration, for she is very intelligent and very observing ; she condescends to let herself be admired, and openly patronizes me and takes me under her protection.

We part excellent friends, and when she comes to our house at evening with Uncle Scipio I can feel my heart going pit-a-pat, merely at sight of her coming in at the door, her abundant brown hair surmounted by a most coquettish hat *a la* Pamela.

For the family dinner that evening the board is spread, to quote M. Jacobi, “on a scale of Eastern magnificence, regardless of expense.” There are a vol-au-vent, a roasted turkey, crawfish and a ricecake—which is the very *ne plus ultra* of festivity at the pharmacy. “Lucullus dines to-day with Lucullus !” Lawyer Dieu-donne appositely exclaims as Adele appears with the turkey.

Little Alice does not appear the least bit disconcerted by the splendor of the banquet, which to me seems to express the very utmost limit of culinary sumptuosity. Her place at table is between me and Aristide, where she gives more of her attention to the guests than to the menu. There is a mocking, laughing light

dancing in her eyes, and by the disdainful pout of her red lips I can see that she looks on all these provincials of Villotte as so many strange animals. She talks with no one but me, and takes dainty little mouthfuls from the dishes that are placed before her. As if to make up for her reserve, Uncle Scipio outdoes himself in cordiality, expatiating vociferously on the juiciness of the roast, the freshness of the shellfish and the sweetness of the home-made bread.

“One has to come to the country to get wholesome things to eat,” he avers.

And likewise, when he gets on his feet and makes a little speech eulogistic of the bouquet of the thin sour wine of Villotte, tears of tender regret stand in his eyes. In a word, he makes a conquest of the entire company, with the single exception of Grandma Pechoin, who is distrustful and reserved.

When we rise from table to go and take coffee in the drawing-room, Alice draws me to one side and whispers :

“That boy who kept dipping his fingers in his gravy all through the dinner, is he your cousin?”

“Yes, that’s Aristide. What do you think of him?”

“I think he’s horrid. He reminds me of a Punch and Judy show.”

“And yet,” I reply with a tinge of bitterness, “he is the pet of the household, and every one thinks that I am nothing alongside him.”

“That shows their bad taste,” little Alice

replies, eying me from head to foot. "You are ever so much better-looking than he!"

This opinion of the brown-eyed maiden is like balm poured on my ulcerated heart; she approaches me on my weak side—to wit, my vanity—and this suffuses a most charming cerulean hue over all the remainder of my evening, which is nevertheless superlatively tiresome. The grown people have got up a round game and appear to be enjoying themselves. Aristide, who was helped twice from every dish at dinner, throws himself unceremoniously upon the sofa and goes to sleep. Little Alice, who has either lost her tongue or else is overcome by the soporific tendencies in the atmosphere of the barnlike room, has ensconced herself in a fauteuil where, her chin resting on her hand and her eyes fixed dreamily upon the ceiling, she may be thinking of Paris, its pleasures and its spectacles. Awed by her silence and too much a stranger as yet to venture to interrupt her reverie, I have seated myself on a footstool, almost at her feet, and gaze on her with respectful tenderness, much as one might contemplate an idol or a little queen. My eyes rest with rapturous delight on the billowy abundance of her black hair, caught up at the back of the neck with a bow of red ribbon; I admire the effect of the soft shadows that fall from her long, curved lashes across her pale cheek; a mad desire seizes me to bend over and press my lips to the tips of her little bronze boots.

The pleasure that I derive from this mute adoration is such that I could willingly remain

at my post on the footstool all night long. I would like that the hands of the clock should cease to move and that Alice should not stir from her fauteuil; and yet, with strange inconsistency, I at the same time await impatiently the moment when the people shall rise to go, because at parting I hope to succeed in obtaining another kiss from my new friend.

Uncle Scipio seems to be of little Alice's mind, to prefer me to Cousin Aristide and be favorably disposed toward me. Not only did he avert the thunders of the family council from my devoted head, but he has also been using his influence with the hard-hearted schoolmaster to make him reconsider his sentence of expulsion, and, thanks to the persuasive quality of his mellifluous eloquence, has succeeded in appeasing the tyrant's wrath. Pestel, who has the theory of fractions at his finger-ends, having discovered upon consideration that two half-boarders are better than one, consents to receive me back again, and Uncle Scipio in person reconducts me to the fold.

"Come, Jacques," says he, remarking the fluttering of my hand that he holds in his own, "don't be afraid—Pestel won't eat you. You are not delighted at the prospect of going back to him, which I can easily understand, having once seen the ugly mug of your dispenser of hash. But never mind, I have cut his claws for him, and you'll find him as gentle as a lamb."

It appears quite natural to me that silver-tongued Uncle Scipio should have tamed the

tiger Pestel; but I know that I—poor I—have not the uncle's glorious gift, and something tells me that more than probably the master will "take it out" of me in return for the courtesy shown Scipio Mouginot. The prospect does not tend to raise my spirits and my apprehensions are legible on my face.

"Poor little man," Uncle Scipio continues, "I'm afraid you don't always have a very happy time of it at Villotte. The drug store is not the liveliest place in the world? My brother Victor has a heavy hand, and his wife is not always kind to you, hey?"

"Not always, Uncle Scipio."

"Very well, *morbleu!* If they make it too hard for you, come and hunt me up at Paris—you will be welcomed in my home with open arms. I will show you the great city, the seat of the arts and sciences, and I'll put you in the way to make your fortune. The cloth business will soon be on its feet and you shall have a place in our office. I will see you have good cards to play, and, in place of rusting at Villotte, we'll make a Parisian of you—"

"Thank you, Uncle Scipio!"

My heart dilates within my bosom and I feel my courage returning as he speaks. The wonderful man has a gift of investing the commonest affairs of life with a halo of prismatic light; he is a sorcerer, and everywhere he goes he exercises his spell. He is hand and glove with the proprietress and waiters of the Hotel du Cygne, who bow and scrape until they almost break their backs whenever he opens his lips.

He has succeeded in rendering unbending Uncle Victor comparatively supple, has smoothed down Aunt Mouginot's obtrusive angles and thawed the ice of the Mouginot-Tupins. These last have invited him to dinner, and, not to be behindhand, the Mouginot-Pechoins have arranged a garden party in his honor at the Petit-Jure for the coming Thursday.

As I look back to that summer afternoon among the woods, it is one of my most cherished memories. My aunt Mouginot, who has a dispensation from her neuralgia for that day, nimbly mounts Cadet, who trots along right merrily under the cheering influence of Uncle Victor's droll refrains. M. Dieudonne Jacobi has assumed charge of Cousin Aristide, to whom he discourses on the harmonies of nature and who yawns portentously as he listens, so that I have little Alice all to myself. I enjoy myself hugely while exhibiting to her the wonders of the forest and conducting her from one to another of my favorite resorts. Matters take a less agreeable turn, however, when on reaching our destination Aristide attaches himself to us like a burr and never once leaves us. He insists on accompanying us in our woodland walk and thrusts himself stupidly into our conversation.

"He makes me tired, that cousin of yours!" little Alice whispers in my ear.

"Wait, we'll see if we can't get rid of him."

We make for a spot where the thicket is densest, and, while Aristide is hopelessly tangled up in a bramble patch, where the thorns lay

hold of him by the trousers, we succeed in gaining a side path. There I take Alice by the hand and we run as if our lives were at stake, paying no attention to Aristide's repeated calls, whose struggles only serve to imbed him more firmly still among the brambles, and who shouts to us in tones of rage and terror :

“Hallo—hallo ! where are you ? ”

“Here, this way,” little Alice mischievously replies, while she pulls me away in a direction directly opposite.

We have left the wood behind us and are in a stretch of fallow land, where an occasional clump of ferns exhales in the hot sunshine an odor strong and pungent as that of the black currant. Before us the undulating plain, blazing with light and bright with flowers, stretches away to meet the bluish haze of forest that forms the horizon. Above us, in the deep-blue sky, where the larks—an invisible choir—are practicing their joyous anthem, a few white, fleecy clouds are drifting lazily. Alice is quite out of breath after our mad scamper ; a scarlet flush is on her cheek ; the beating of her heart can be distinguished under the corsage of her frock of tartan plaid ; her luxuriant black hair is thick-set with green leaves captured from the bushes along her path. She sinks down among the ferns and I kneel at her feet.

Then, by way of amusing her and to enhance my importance in her eyes, I relate to her the stories I have invented of the plain and its mysterious purlieus ; I tell her that that blue strip she sees, far away in the distance, is the sea,

and that, concealed in the depths of that vaporous forest to the left, is an enchanted castle. But little Alice is not the least like Aristide; her imagination is not bound down to things of earth, and I soon see that, richer and more venturesome even than my own, it takes a longer and a stronger flight toward the land of faëry. She has read quantities of books that I never heard of, and her head is an inexhaustible storehouse of old legends and tales of adventure. She enters the realm of fantasy as if it were the home in which she has her being, and beside hers my poor little stories cut a pitiful figure.

“No, no; that’s not the way it goes!” she interrupts with a positive air. “This is the forest of Broceliande; I am the fairy Vivien, and you are a knight of King Arthur’s court. You have crossed the forest at the peril of your life, and now are come to the desert where the enchanter Merlin is keeping me a prisoner by means of his wicked spells. You peep out from the edge of the wood and behold me in the midst of the great lonely plain, and you listen to my song—”

And then she begins to sing, in a charming little voice, low and sweet as robin redbreast’s:

“ ‘La belle est au jardin d’amour
Depuis un mois ou six semaines;
Sou pere la cherche partout
Et sou ami est bien en peine—’ ”

“And then,” I rapturously break in, “I come galloping up and release you—”

“Oh, but wait a minute—the thing is not so

easy as all that. I cannot stir on account of the spell that Merlin has cast on me, and I bid you go in quest of mandragora and marjolaine to break the charm. Come, be off with you, and hurry back !”

I obey abjectly. I do not succeed in finding either the mandragora or the marjolaine, but I bring back a great armful of flowering honeysuckle and twine the sweet-breathed plants into crowns, sashes and bracelets, with which I deck the girl's head, waist and wrists. She is so charming thus that I go down on my knees in ecstasy before her, as if she were a saint.

Little Alice receives it quite as a matter of course ; she is one of those beings who seem entitled of right to adoration and do not hesitate to enforce their claim. She smiles on me complacently through her floral regalia and receives my homage like a queen to whom it is no novelty.

“ And now,” she continues, “ the charm is broken. I give you my lily-white hand and say to you : ‘ Sir Knight, conduct me to your castle,’ ” and therewith extends her arm to me with a regal gesture. The larks are singing in the blue vault, the air is heavy with the perfume of the honeysuckle, the charm of the moment is inexpressible. I take the little hand, and tenderly, reverently raise it to my lips.

Suddenly a strident voice salutes us from behind.

“ What are you doing there ? ”

Is it the enchanter Merlin appearing from the depths of air, or some maleficent fairy come to

plague us? Neither the one nor the other; it is simply Aunt Victor Mouginot, who, drawn hither by the screech-owl cries of her Benjamin, has come hastening to the rescue and then has started forth in search of Alice and me.

“Why did you run away from poor Aristide,” she continues in her harsh, grating voice, “just because he wanted to play with you? Come, get up from there, and be quick about it! It’s indecent, a great boy and girl like you playing together all by yourselves. Shame on you!”

This time the spell is broken for good and all. We follow her, grumbling inwardly, while Aristide, gloating over our discomfiture, makes hideous faces at us and presents himself in the light of the mischief-making dwarf, who is the constant satellite of the wicked fairy. The remainder of our afternoon is no better than a dismal ruin, for my straitlaced aunt arranges matters so that little Alice and I shall be kept asunder.

The next day Scipio Mouginot is to leave us. We accompany the travelers to the railway that has recently been constructed between Villotte and Paris.

Uncle Scipio, fresh as a rose, in immaculate gloves and his light-gray overcoat, with his precious morocco portfolio under his arm, heads the column with Uncle Victor at his side. He carries his head erect and walks with something of a swagger, smiling patronizingly on the proprietress of the hotel and the waiters, who escort him to the door. One would swear that he

has the millions that the famous military cloth is to bring in safe in his portfolio. Behind come little Alice, I and Aristide, the latter still obstinately bent on poking his ugly face between us two. Beside the platform of the station the train stands waiting with open doors, while the locomotive fumes and chafes, emitting clouds of black smoke with a dull rumbling in its entrails. My heart is heavy, I can find nothing to say, and give the hand of my little friend a vigorous squeeze.

“Well,” says Scipio, when he has selected a first-class compartment, before which he takes his stand, proud as a prince on his travels, “well, Victor, the time has come when we must part, but you will hear from me before long; and mark my words, the news will gladden your heart. Embrace me!”

He gives the druggist a cordial hug, pats Aristide on the head, and raises me in his arms:

“Courage, Jacques,” he exclaims; “be a man and work hard!” Then, lowering his voice and clasping me more closely to his decorative shirt-front: “You know what I said to you—if they abuse you, come and look me up. You will find a warm welcome and be treated as if you were a son of my own.”

“All aboard, passengers for Paris, all aboard!”

I have barely time to give little Alice a parting kiss. The doors are closed with a bang. Uncle Scipio pokes his head out from his open window and waves his hand to us, while, sur-

rounded by a cloud of steam, the train crawls from the station and moves away over the long line of rails that lie glittering in the sunshine.

CHAPTER VI.

UNCLE SCIPIO's passage through Villotte may be likened to a dazzling meteor, flaming through the heavens for a moment only to vanish on the horizon, leaving a faint trail of phosphorescent light behind.

For some days after his departure the Parisian continues to furnish food for speculation at the pharmacy, where his new-born hopes of fortune form the staple of discussion; but as week after week passes and nothing is heard from him, the wonderful results promised by the cloth business begin to be questioned. M. Dieudonne Jacobi, who is sore because Uncle Scipio did not treat him with the consideration his merits called for, is the first to hazard some specious criticisms; Grandma Pechoin observes that "travelers' tales are hard to verify," Uncle Victor sneers and shrugs his shoulders, and Aunt Mouginot, in her shrewish voice, declares :

"It is another *cacade* ; see if it isn't !"

The long and short of the matter is that the worthy folks begin to have a confused perception that their credulity has been imposed on; they rub their eyes in a shamefaced way, and the glamour of the charmer's eloquence is dissipated. As the amount due for my board and lodging fails to materialize as promised, a flat

denial is given to the proposition that Uncle Scipio is a man of genius, and the druggist even goes to the length of calling him "an ar-rant humbug." And so, little by little, the pharmacy recovers its former humdrum monotony, existence begins to flow again in the same old dull, lifeless stream, and every one seems to have imposed it as a duty on himself to bury Scipio Mouginot and his actions in profound oblivion.

But not quite every one, for I am not a sharer in the general disenchantment, and in my eyes Uncle Scipio retains his prestige unimpaired—nay, even increased by the aureole that is diffused about him by the bright memory of little Alice. The passage athwart my prosaic school-boy life of this dainty little creature, so elegant in all her ways, exhaling such a subtle, exquisite odor of Paris, is like a page of romance. Her acquaintance had awakened in me a class of sentiment hitherto unknown: a sudden intuition of the magic charm that resides in feminine grace, a dawning of chivalric worship for the fair-faced, brown-eyed child who has bewitched me with her beauty and her precocious wealth of imagination. Until then my thoughts had never lingered on the little girls whom I encountered at church or on the street; I looked on them as a class of beings inferior to boys, weaker and less expert at games, inclined to be airish and affected, always intruding where they were not wanted—and that was all. Now I make a business of observing the girls whom I meet and comparing them with my ideal, and

the result is altogether in Alice's favor ; I find them ill-dressed, stupid and coarsely hoydenish in presence of the memory of my pretty Parisienne.

At Pestel's, while recitations are going on, I ensconce myself in the corner formed by the wall and the end of the bench where I have my seat, and, closing my eyes, indulge in dreams of little Alice, crowned with honeysuckle, bending on me her deep-brown eyes and giving me her lily-white hand. What is she doing now while I sit dreaming of her ? Has she forgotten me amid the splendors and delights of that Paris she loves so well ? Shall I see her again some day, and, if I do, will she condescend to remember our friendly walks and talks among the woods of the Petit-Jure ?

I ask myself these questions, turning them over and over in my mind with a secret sense of satisfaction, but not trying to answer them, preferring rather that they should float on the smooth summer sea of indeterminateness, like flowers mirrored in the bosom of a stream, that the ceaseless flow of the current rocks with an uninterrupted caressing motion, without giving them a moment's rest or causing them a moment's weariness. I abandon myself to my reveries and am lapped in deepest delight when suddenly I am summoned back to earth again by a voice that sputters :

“Mouginot (Jacques), you will do me the favor to conjugate twice over the verb : ‘I gaze at the ceiling instead of studying my lessons’ !”

As little Alice's image is the charm that dispels the tedium of my hours of study, so also is it the sole companion of my holidays. Whenever we go out to the "property" to spend the afternoon, I unceremoniously abandon Aristide to his devices and make the solitary pilgrimage to the fields that we visited, Alice and I, one July afternoon. The ferns that she pressed with her little foot have not raised their heads, their slender fronds still retain the impress of her girlish form. To the spot where she sat and held her state I bring big white stones and there erect a sort of altar; the central portion, which I have made hollow, I fill with dry twigs and bits of wood, and in it—mindful of what I have been reading recently—light a fire in honor of my fairy Vivien! From the shrubs and bushes round about I suspend garlands of honeysuckle, and upon the coals blazing on the altar I strew stalks of wild thyme and branches of juniper, from which the aroma-laden smoke rises on the still air. And as the azure wreaths ascend—so thin, so evanescent—they remind me of little Alice's airy, graceful form.

The days fly by, one after another, and with the first mists of October and the last songs of the vintage my vacation draws to an end. I resume my place in Pestel's school, and as my twelfth birthday is now close at hand, devote much of my attention to the catechism in preparation for my first communion. Ceasing to be one of the unregenerate I am become a sort of mystic, and in my newly acquired mysticism little Alice's image undergoes a sort of meta-

morphosis: she is no longer the fairy Vivien, but is transformed into a darling little saint of the Golden Legend, a saint white and fragile as a lily. I have attacks of pious zeal every now and then; I form good resolutions and make up my mind to work hard and faithfully in order to acquire the knowledge necessary to do credit to the position Uncle Scipio is keeping warm for me, and to render myself more worthy of little Alice. But my good resolves all fall to the ground in presence of the insufferable cruelties of my tyrant, the vulture Pestel. The man has a fashion peculiar to himself of inculcating learning into the youth intrusted to his care: he beats it into them with the ferule, and strives to impress it on their memory with imprecations and injurious epithets uttered in Gascon dialect. It does not take me long to become disgusted with this Spartan regimen; I suffer a relapse into my old sin of idleness and deteriorate again into a "dunce," as Uncle Victor takes pleasure in repeating to the echoes of the drug store. Tasks and punishments of every sort are rained on my devoted head, my weekly reports are invariably bad, and the ancient terrors of my pitiful Saturday night home-coming recur with deplorable regularity.

At night, when I retire to the little room that the exemplary Aristide and I occupy in common, my repugnance for school and all connected with it amounts to positive loathing, and I am sore with the tongue-lashing received at the hands of the Mougnot-Pechoins. Then, curled in my little bed and feigning slumber, I

revolve in mind the parting words of Uncle Scipio: "If they abuse you, come to me; you will be received with open arms." Rebellious thoughts, ideas of desertion begin to assume form within my head, and I yield myself to new and pleasurable dreams, which all radiate from the central project of cutting loose from the pharmacy. I behold myself leaving home some fine morning, and, instead of heading for Pestel's school, taking the road that leads to Paris. How I am to make the long journey and subsist by the way is a matter that does not greatly worry me; I have a trustful belief that the innkeepers along the road, thanks to my good looks, will afford me their hospitality gratis, and that good-natured wagoners will give me an occasional lift. Is it not thus that matters shape themselves in certain narratives I have read? Then one night I shall alight at Paris and ask where Uncle Scipio lives. There will be no difficulty in finding him; for every one must know his house, and, besides, I have his address in black and white on the fly-leaf of my grammar, having taken pains to set it down one day that Uncle Victor gave it to the proprietress of the Hotel du Cygne in my hearing. Uncle Scipio's place of residence is No. 118 Faubourg Saint-Martin. Armed with this information I cannot go astray. As soon as I am safely housed and shall have embraced my uncle, I will ask him to show me the way to little Alice's. I know that she lives not far away. She told me so. I will ascend the stairs on tip-toe, will open the door ever so softly and pre-

sent myself before her like the knight-errant of whom she told me that day in the field of the Petit-Jure; and, like the fairy Vivien in her bower of ferns, she will extend to me her lily-white hand.

These castles in the air, reared, demolished and rebuilt many times each night, help to console me for my hard times at Pestel's and the snubs and sarcasms of Uncle Victor. The school year, meantime, is drawing to a close, and it is not without a certain feeling of uneasiness that I contemplate the approach of the time when the awards of merit are to be distributed; not that I care a fig for the paper crowns and books in sheepskin binding that Pestel presents to his deserving scholars, but it wounds my pride most cruelly to be taken for an ignoramus by those parents and persons of note who receive an invitation to the ceremonies. I managed to escape the mortifying experience last year; but this time Pestel, with an eye to advertising his establishment, has seen fit to convert the solemnity into a public function. He has sent invitations to the clergy and the municipality, and has written to the parents urging that *all* the pupils shall be present at the reading of the roll of honor. As Aristide expects to hear his name mentioned frequently, my aunt has decided that I am not to absent myself on this occasion, which will be to me "a lesson and an example."

Aristide has been fitted out anew from top to toe in honor of the event; he has a brand-new suit of gooseberry-colored cotton velvet jacket,

waistcoat and trousers, made specially to order for him. When toggled out in his new integuments, red as a beet from head to foot, with the exception of his tallowy face, my cousin bears a striking resemblance to a candy image in a confectioner's window. In his own eyes, however, he is very fine in his suit of cheap velvet, the creases of which reflect the light suspiciously. He is constantly going to the mirror to admire himself, and casts pitying looks on my threadbare blue jacket. Since noon he has been strutting up and down the shop so as to exhibit himself to the customers in all the glory of a model boy, whose honors will constitute a load too heavy for his shoulders.

It is one o'clock in the afternoon when Mme. Victor Mouginot-Pechoin at last makes her appearance, dressed in her poult de soie gown, with a cashmere shawl of domestic manufacture over her shoulders and on her head a hat surrounded by a wreath of pansies. She takes Aristide under her umbrella, for the rain is coming down in torrents, and we turn our steps toward the schoolhouse, the wide double doors of which are thrown open to their full extent.

Pestel has done things handsomely. The great dormitory has been transformed into a lecture-hall and decorated with flowers and foliage; a promiscuous crowd is packed in there densely and fills every inch of space in front of the long table covered with green baize, on which is a great display of books and tinsel crowns, and behind which are seated in state the curés, vicars and a few of the city fathers.

The pupils are seated in two rows along the walls, and the band of the National Guard, stationed at the further end of the hall, proclaims the opening of the exercises by a furious blowing of horns and banging of the big drum. Pestel, in dress-coat and white tie, looks longer and lanker than usual and has more than ever the appearance of a bald-headed bird of prey. He rises to his feet, waves the sheets of paper he holds in his hand as a signal for silence, and mouthingly declaims a prolix, tiresome harangue, manifestly stolen from some treatise on pedagogy. The dignitaries, civil and ecclesiastical, nod approvingly from the depths of their comfortable easy-chairs and occasionally pinch themselves slyly on the leg to keep from falling asleep. The parents, not so conspicuously placed, oppose less resistance to the influence of the Pestelian oratory and slumber peacefully on their wooden chairs. A blare from the wind instruments sufficient to demolish the walls of Jericho, a terrific thump on the bass drum, arouses them with a start; the harangue has reached an end and an usher proceeds to call the roll of honor. A fanfare of trumpets salutes the names of the victors; they pass before me and I see them go up and make their bow in front of the platform, receive the congratulations of a priest or councilman, and return proudly to their places with their gayly decorated volumes. Aristide has four prizes and five *accessits*, and each time he steps forward, displaying his gooseberry-colored suit against the green of the table-cover, it would seem as if

the brass instruments, maddened by the discordant note, play with redoubled vigor. When he comes down he salutes me with a look of scornful pity, and declines his head on Aunt Victor's domestic camel's-hair, who embraces him and makes a pretense of wiping away some tears. I do not stir hand or foot, concealing myself behind the broad backs of my country schoolmates and making myself as inconspicuous as possible.

For all that I cannot help fancying that every eye is bent on me; it seems to me that I can read, writ in plain letters on the faces of parents, priests and city fathers: "*Not even an accessit!* What a dunce!" And there is no denying the fact that this unkind reflection is distinctly legible in my Aunt Victor's yellow eyes and on the sneering countenance of Aristide, who takes manifest pleasure in parading ostentatiously before my gaze his gilded crowns and volumes of Mame's library. I begin to feel the "mustard getting into my nose," and am strongly tempted to pay my respects to my insupportable cousin in the shape of a sound thump; it is time the ceremonies should end—

To the notes of a final fanfare the audience rises and seeks the street. It is no longer raining, but the roadway is become a lake of mud, of the color and consistency of yellowish cream. Aunt Mouginot has all she can attend to to hold up her skirts and respond to the loud-voiced congratulations of her acquaintances, and has left us—Aristide and me—far in the rear. I march

along beside my cousin, who, embarrassed with his wealth of crowns and prizes, skirts the margin of the muddy roadway and dares not attempt to cross it.

“Look out,” I say to him, ironically, “you will spoil your fine gooseberry-colored suit.”

“You can see for yourself,” he replies, with a supercilious air, “that I can’t turn up my pantaloons. My arms are full of books—” And therewith he perks up his head, strutting and bridling like a peacock spreading his tail. “Your hands are at liberty,” he continued, in a dictatorial tone; “all the prizes that *you* got won’t bother you much. Turn up the bottoms of my trousers, will you?”

He tries my patience beyond endurance, this insufferable cousin of mine, with his airs of superiority. Does he think I am his lackey? My eyes take in the expanse of liquid mud and thence travel back to the fine crimson suit, and a diabolical scheme of revenge enters my head. I stoop down as if to do his bidding, and while he, all unconscious of my fell design, innocently extends his leg, with a sudden push I send the exemplar of all the virtues tumbling, flat on his face, in the yellowish mud. The books are scattered in every direction upon the filthy ooze, the crowns go floating down the gutter, and I, like the little hypocrite I am, proceed with a great show of alacrity to collect the scattered trophies, leaving meanwhile Aristide to bawl and blubber at his ease in his bed of creamy mud.

At last some one picks him up. Great Heavens, what a state he is in! The entire

front of the fine red suit is plastered with a deposit of moist, adhesive earth; he looks like a form of gooseberry jelly garnished with a coating of apricot paste. Aristide's face has fared no better than the rest of his person; the tears, trickling down his cheeks, have cut great channels through the superincumbent grime. Choking with rage and unable to enunciate for his sobs, he points at me with a denouncing finger. Mme. Victor Mouginot, who has hastened to the scene of the disaster at the best speed she is capable of, turns fairly green.

"A brand-new velvet suit!" she stammers, in trembling tones. "How did this thing happen?"

"Jacques pushed me—on purpose!" Aristide replies, amid a storm of sobs.

"I thought as much!" Mme. Mouginot declares, in a voice sibilant with anger; "that boy was born with instincts of depravity. It was envy—nothing but his wicked, black-hearted envy—that prompted him to this abominable action. Come along, you little wretch; your case shall have attention!"

She seizes me by the arm, while at her other side crawls Aristide, a sorry spectacle with his streaming garments, and, amid the indignant exclamations of the crowd, drags us off toward the pharmacy. She is mastered by her anger to that degree that she is wholly unmindful of her precious poult de soie gown, the bottom of which trails pitifully in the mire and water.

We are in a breathless condition on reaching our destination. Mme. Mouginot flings back

the door and sails into the shop as if propelled by a tornado, deposits Aristide in muddy state upon a bench, and hales me before Uncle Victor, who is speechless with amazement.

“Behold !” she screams, “another of your worthless nephew’s pretty tricks !”

At first the druggist fails to grasp the situation ; then, when his wife has recovered breath sufficiently to explain the extent and nature of my crime, he knits his brows in a terrible frown.

“It is an ill-conditioned brute,” he growls, his rage mounting to a white heat, “but I will see if I can’t prevent him from doing further mischief. Until I make up my mind what is to be done with him he shall go and take up his residence in the old workroom.”

Whereon he grasps my arm with a nip that pinches like the claw of a lobster. In a trice I find myself immured between four bare walls, with no companion save my remorse.

Remorse ? Do I really feel remorse ? It is quite certain, and I do not attempt to deny it, that the method I adopted of getting even with Aristide had but little of the chivalrous to recommend it. I took an unfair advantage of his stupidity in order that his pride might have a fall. But what of it ? It would have done no good to challenge him to fight it out, for he is so pigeon-livered he would have run away. Besides, why did he keep provoking me with his conceited airs, and why did he address me as if I were his servant ? He got no more than he deserved—he won’t be so proud of his goose-

berry-colored suits in future. Didn't he cut a pretty figure when he came out from his mud bath? I cannot help laughing as I think of the ridiculous picture Aristide presents as he lay sprawling in the puddles of yellow mud and water, and my hilarious fit dissipates whatever remorse I may have felt momentarily. No, on the whole I am not sorry for the damage sustained by his fine cotton-velvet suit—I would do it again if the occasion offered.

In the meantime, while Adele in the kitchen is scraping with a carving-knife the mud from my victim's trousers and jacket, in the shop my fate is being decided and my sentence pronounced: when school opens in October I am to go back to Pestel's and remain in durance there as a boarder.

But it is six weeks from now to the first of October, and during that time it seems there is no other course than to keep me at home. Mme. Victor Mouginot declares that she shall never feel that Aristide is safe so long as he and I are under the same roof.

"Your nephew," she repeats to Uncle Victor, "has every evil instinct; if he is suffered to remain here he is capable of attempting the murder of my son!"

The question of what is to be done with me proves a very intricate one. It is not practicable to secure me a lodging-place outside, and, on the other hand, Uncle Victor feels some scruples of conscience about keeping me incarcerated for weeks in the disused laboratory. The discussion is protracted, and every one pro-

poses some way of solving the difficulty. Meanwhile I continue to vegetate in my prison, whither my meals are brought me twice each day. When Adele is otherwise occupied it is the apprentice, Arsene Camus, who fills the position of turnkey.

Arsene Camus is a tall, flaxen-haired young man of two-and-twenty, with timid manners and kindly, expressionless, bovine eyes. One evening, when he has deposited my bread, meat and vegetables on top of the range, he stands loitering by the door and murmurs diffidently :

“A melancholy vacation you are having, Monsieur Jacques !”

Instead of replying to this overture I assume a freezing air and devote my entire attention to the dish of boiled beef he has placed before me ; but Arsene is not to be rebuffed thus, and, having first cleared his throat with a loud ‘hem !’ goes on to develop his proposition :

“You find it pretty uncomfortable here, don’t you ?”

(It is more than pretty, it is very uncomfortable in the old laboratory, where it is pitch dark at five o’clock ; but not for an empire would I admit it.)

“Oh, no, Arsene, I assure you I do not ; one gets used to it, you know.”

“But it may be that they will keep you here longer than you think for,” replies the apprentice, “and after a while you will begin to tire of it. The folks out there don’t like the idea of letting you run with Aristide after the trick you played him, and they are puzzling their

brains to know what to do with you between now and the time when you are to go and board at Pestel's. And so, while I was listening to them discussing the question just now, I had an idea, Monsieur Jacques."

"What is your idea, Arsene?"

"The fête of the folks at home falls on the day of Notre Dame in September, which is Sunday next, and every year at this time M. Mouginot gives me a day or two off to let me have a chance to go to Tremont and see my parents. If you think well of it, Monsieur Jacques, I might propose to the boss to let me take you down there with me and leave you there. Tremont is only a stone's throw from Jeand'heurs, where you have relatives. Once away from here you might kill two birds with one stone and go and pass the rest of your vacation with your cousins, the Delorme-Grodards, who would be glad to see you. What do you think of it?"

What do I think of it? Forsooth, I find Arsene's idea a most capital one; five weeks of liberty, even in the country and spent with my cousins the Delormes, have a most alluring aspect for me. But there is small likelihood that Uncle and Aunt Mouginot, in their present frame of mind toward me, will ever consent to glve me the key of the fields. I express my fears to Arsene, who replies, with Spartan brevity:

"That is my lookout. Are you willing I should lay the matter before your uncle as originating with me?"

I give the good fellow the desired permission with the utmost readiness, but greatly fear he is deluding himself with false hopes. The visit to Tremont appears to me so problematical that I will not even suffer myself to think of it.

It must be, however, that my Aunt Victor is extremely anxious to be rid of me; for, contrary to my expectation, she raises no objection to Arsene's request. Uncle Victor, abandoned to his free will, does not hesitate to give a favorable answer; with all his hardness and rigidity he does not inflict punishment for the sake of any pleasure he finds in it; he is a great lover of peace and quietness, and doubtless considers there will be fewer rumpuses in the family when his nephew is once out of the way. On Saturday morning, therefore, I am apprised that I am to have my bundle packed and ready, because I am to start for Tremont with Arsene that very same day at four o'clock in the afternoon.

It is not necessary to repeat the order to me, and I go in search of my aunt to receive her final instructions; she has nothing to say more than to declare with a shrug of her shoulders that it is very good of Arsene to saddle himself with the charge of a reprobate like me, and that he doesn't know the trouble and annoyance he is preparing for himself. As for her, thank the Lord, she has no further concern in the matter, and will only say: "Good-by, and a good riddance to bad rubbish!" Whereon I make my bow and go to make my adieus to Grandma Pechoin.

The charming old lady is more indulgently in-

clined than her daughter, and while taking me to task for my delinquencies, her natural good-heartedness prompts her to speak of a matter that had not given the Mouginots the slightest concern.

"Are you to be away for long, my child?" she asks.

"Until school opens again, probably, Mme. Pechoin."

"And did they give you a little spending money?"

I answer in the negative, my pocket being quite empty.

"Ah!" she exclaims, "that is just like M. Mouginot's stinginess. What sense is there, I'd like to know, in sending this boy away among strangers and giving him no pocket-money?"

It pleases her immensely whenever an opportunity is afforded her of giving a cut at her son-in-law, whom she detests; she shrugs her shoulders, rises, and goes and fumbles in her secretary, from which she extracts a coin that shines with a most agreeable luster.

"You were a very naughty boy to treat poor Aristide as you did," she goes on, "but that is no reason why they should send you off without a penny to your name. See, here is a louis of twenty francs for your small expenses. Don't spend it foolishly, and try to be a good boy."

For a moment I look with stupefied amazement on the glittering golden disk; I cannot believe my senses. Then suddenly my eyes are bedewed with an access of grateful sensibility,

and I cast myself weeping into good Grandma Pechoin's arms.

CHAPTER VII.

At four o'clock, just as the sun is beginning to decline toward the heights of Fains, and the windows in the Dominican convent are blazing with a ruddier hue, Arsene and I climb our way upward to the *Paquis* of the upper town, where the road leading to Tremont branches off from the main street. Arsene carries the small bundle that constitutes my entire baggage, for the rest of my worldly effects are to be forwarded by wagon as soon as I am fairly housed with Cousin Delorme. I trot along joyously, glad to leave the pharmacy behind me, proud that I am taking the bit between my teeth. True, there is something on my mind that keeps rising from time to time to make my happiness less perfect : it is the certainty that on my return I am to be immured as a boarder in the dungeon of my enemy Pestel ; but I console myself with the reflection that I still have five weeks of liberty before me, and as at my age five weeks are an eternity, I think only of making the most of the present.

To shorten our way we strike into the great wood of Combles. Even thus early the shadows are gathering thick beneath the tall old trees ; at intervals few and far between the oblique rays of the setting sun penetrate the wood and illuminate it with splashes of red,

mysterious light. When we have gone forward half an hour even the red splashes are seen no longer; we seem to be pursuing our way amid the shades of night, when suddenly the dense foliage parts before us and we come out on the plateau, over which the purple glamour of twilight is lingering still.

Long, lumbering wains loaded with oat-sheaves are creeping slowly homeward, their moving silhouettes profiled in black against the sky-line; here and there thin spirals of smoke arise on the calm air from fires where farmers are burning their potato tops, and the east wind brings to our ears the faint tinkling of church bells ringing in honor of the morrow's fête. The plateau gradually begins to slope away; from the depths of a thickly wooded gorge comes the sound of running water, the top of a spire is visible rising above a shadowy clump of trees, and Arsene tells me:

“We are nearly there.”

Tremont is a village whose one single street winds in and out circuitously at the foot of three hills. A brook, that has its source among the mountains of the frontier and divides almost immediately into two branches, laves the foundations of the houses with its whispering, tinkling current. Here and there a rustic stone bridge is thrown across the little stream, affording communication between the roadway and the dwellings of the villagers, who are lulled night and day by the ceaseless chatter of the streamlet.

Arsene pilots me across one of these bridges

and pushes inward a door which opens directly upon a large apartment, seemingly devoted to the twofold use of kitchen and dining-room. In less time than it takes to say Jack Robinson he is beset, surrounded ; his mother, a lean peasant woman with wrinkled face, clasps him about the neck, his father gives him a great slap on the back by way of welcome, his little brothers climb upon his shoulders. When the effusion of the boisterous greeting has in some measure subsided he introduces me :

“ This is M. Jacques, the boss’s nephew and M. Delorme’s cousin.”

The title “ the boss’s nephew ” must carry with it great weight of influence among those worthy people, for immediately I am petted and pampered as if I were a little prince. Father Camus forces me into a chair over which is spread a sheepskin, which would seem to be the seat of honor ; Mother Camus throws upon the hearth an armful of twigs that blaze up merrily, the little Camuses eye me with respectful deference. It is right for me to confess that these marks of attention are greatly needed to assist me in overcoming the feeling of disappointment that I experience at first. My knowledge of life has been restricted to the Mougnot pharmacy and its neighborhood, I am entirely ignorant of the laborious and saving life our peasants lead ; moreover, my small head is stuffed with romantic dreams ; consequently the home of Arsene’s parents strikes me as very poor and colorless.

I cast a discomfited glance to right and left

of me; by the light of the lamp suspended from the under side of the mantelpiece I take note of the floor of rough-hewn planks, the dark-brown walls decorated with primitive cooking utensils, the strips of bacon hung on hooks inserted in the rafters of the ceiling, the deep, soot-blackened fireplace in which a kettle-ful of potatoes is hanging from the crane; finally, the vacant, expressionless faces of the two peasants, whose backs are prematurely bent by their daily labor in the vineyard. To me, a little city boy, accustomed to the comparative luxury of the Mouginot abode, these country quarters seem mean in their unadorned rusticity and I cannot make myself at home there.

The supper, which is served soon after our arrival, is not calculated to induce in me a more cheerful frame of mind. As is most frequently the case among the country folk of the Barrois, it consists of a quarter of bacon, potatoes and a salad of lettuce dressed with cream, the whole dished in porringers of glazed brown earthenware upon a table innocent of cloth, with a bottle of sour wine to wash it down. Although my walk has made me hungry I do not take kindly to my food, and I have the homesick air of a king's son in exile among barbarians. And yet it is evident that the excellent people are doing their best to please me; Mother Camus brings in by way of dessert a plateful of dried cherries and a piece of home-made bun. But everything is against me to-night: the dried cherries are all pit and

there is no butter to spread on the sweetened bread; my porringer is almost as full at the end of the repast as at the beginning. As soon as we rise from table I ask Arsene to show me to my bedroom, to which he makes answer at first with an embarrassed smile. I reiterate my request, and then he explains to me apologetically that the family are greatly straitened for room; he himself has to share the bed of his two small brothers, and it has been decided that I am to sleep at the schoolmaster's. That is the last drop in the overflowing bucket. The idea of spending the night among strangers is excessively disagreeable to me, and while Arsene shoulders my bundle I follow him dejectedly along the dark, deserted street to the schoolhouse.

The room allotted to me serves as dormitory for the master's two boys, and when Arsene opens the door and shows me in the lads are already sound asleep. I take off my clothes with a sensation of embarrassment, observing the utmost precaution not to make a noise and awake my two roommates. It costs me an effort of the will to climb into the high, old-fashioned bed, where I am forthwith lost among the feathers and of which the coarse sheets rasp my skin. I sleep badly; not a moment passes but I start from my slumber at some unaccustomed sound. I have a sensation of being lost and not knowing where I am, and terrors possess my soul as I listen to the wheezy breathing of the sleepers, the plaintive murmur of the brook that flows before the house, the

gnawing of mice behind the wainscot. At last, however, just as it is growing light, I drop off into a profound slumber from which I am abruptly aroused by shouts and peals of laughter. The brilliant sunlight, streaming in through the curtainless window, strikes full upon my bed, and the master's two boys, who have been awake this long time, are making merry over the spectacle afforded by the "little city gentleman" in his tasseled nightcap. My discomfiture increases under their coarse, rustic gayety, which is checked for a moment, but presently explodes again more noisily than ever. I dash the offending nightcap on the floor and get up, annoyed and irritated to have to endure the inquisitive gaze of these two hobbledehoyes while dressing. And so, when Arsene finally appears to deliver me from the company of the young savages, the first question I put to him betrays my pitiably uncomfortable condition of mind.

"Arsene," I say to him, "when are you going to take me to my cousin's?"

Good-natured Arsene has only to look at my long face to see that I am not enchanted with my visit to Tremont. He blushed slightly.

"You are not having a very good time of it with us, I am afraid, Monsieur Jacques," he replies with a penitent air; "in the country, you know, we can't have everything just as we would like to have it. I had intended to wait until after high mass before taking you to M. Delorme's, but as the time seems long to you we'll make a start at once."

He puts my bundle under his arm, and having said good-by to the Camuses, father and mother, we proceed on our way.

Jeand'heurs is a venerable abbey situated on the bank of the Saulx, in the midst of a magnificent growth of old trees which cover the entire slope of the valley on one side. The Saulx, whose emerald-green waters are alive with fish, meanders lazily through a secular park whose copses have been thinned in spots to afford vistas of rich meadows, cultivated fields and villages basking in the bright sunshine. Besides this park the property embraces an iron furnace and a paper mill, situated further up the stream, and my cousin is superintendent of the mill.

We traverse the wood in the direction of its greatest length, and at the end of a stately avenue of beeches, beneath the drooping branches, I have a glimpse of a wing of the chateau, the colonnade of a peristyle, and a row of orange trees in boxes. The sight of the lordly mansion, its imposing façade gilded by the morning sun, restores peace to my ruffled spirit and sends me off dreaming dreams once more of splendor and luxurious living. Up to the present time I have had no other knowledge of chateaux than that derived from picture-books or from my imagination ; to have this one before my eyes, almost within reach of my hand, affords a pleasing titillation to my vanity and my passion for the magnificent. My only fear is that the dwelling of the De-lormes may appear mean beside the ancient

abbey and that there may be further disappointment in store for me in that quarter; I therefore do not venture to question Arsene Camus on the subject, but plod along silently in his footsteps, admiring the slender, stately trunks of the beeches whose long, pliant boughs droop downward in graceful curves and almost sweep the surface of the slumberous stream. Now we are at the boundary wall; we pass through a wicket and enter a path that is paved with the black slag and cinders of the smelting furnace. After following this path for a little less than fifteen minutes it brings us out on a semicircular space, the circumference of which is lined with a row of buildings connected with the paper mill, and at one of the extremities I behold a private house whose stoop and veranda are luxuriantly decorated with five-leaved ivy.

“Here is where your cousin Delorme lives,” murmurs Arsene.

Whether or no Uncle Mougnot has forewarned my cousin of my arrival is more than I can say, but just as we are entering the inclosure a little girl of about my own age, who has been swinging on the gate at the top of the steps, jumps down and rushes away into the house as if to announce our coming, and two minutes later my cousin in person comes forth to meet us. He has not changed since the time when I saw him last at my uncle's, on the occasion of the memorable family conclave; he is the same active, sturdy little man, with the same open, intelligent face, the same abrupt

way of speaking, the same stiff, bushy beard and hair cut *en brosse*. He lifts me off my feet and embraces me.

“How are you, youngster?” is his friendly greeting. “So the Mouginots have consented at last to let you come and see your mother’s relatives? Better late than never. How are you, Arsene? Much obliged for your trouble in bringing us the boy. You are to stay and dine with us, you know. And now, Jacques, come along and get acquainted with your cousins.”

He takes me by the hand; we cross the porch and enter a spacious apartment whose floor is of black and white tiles and whose wainscot, ceiling-high, is adorned with stags’ horns and wild boars’ masks, in the center of which is a round table surrounded by cane-seated chairs. A lady, very active still, notwithstanding she is beginning to show signs of *embonpoint*, a lady with bright gray eyes and chestnut hair knotted behind her head in a scanty chignon, immediately takes me in her arms, scans my face closely, and kissing me warmly on both cheeks, exclaims :

“How like he is to Sophie ! Welcome to our house, my dear. You are the living image of your poor mother. Zelig, embrace your cousin Jacques !”

Zelig is the little girl who was keeping watch and ward on the porch. It appears she is my junior by two years, but no one would suppose so from looking at her sturdy, well-developed form. Her bright, intelligent face, like her

father's, shows evidence of energy and determination. Her features are rather coarse, the jaw being the least bit too square and the cheek-bones a shade too prominent, but her complexion is dazzlingly white, her limpidly blue eyes are full of light, there is a kindly expression and a most charming smile on her ruddy lips; her low, wide forehead is shaded by an abundant growth of chestnut hair which is collected behind and falls down her back in a single heavy braid. The kiss she gives me comes from the heart and she retains my hand in hers.

"Go and play in the garden, children, while I am setting the table," says Mme. Delorme. "I will call you when dinner is ready."

Zelie drags me impetuously away, and we go clattering down the steps into the garden, to which the stream forms a boundary at the further extremity. Properly speaking, it is a kitchen-garden rather than a flower-garden, but the plots of vegetables are all surrounded by beds of generous proportions in which all sorts of old-fashioned flowers display their bright hues and exhale their sweet odors: there are sweet-Williams, blue-bells, lark's-spur, hollyhocks, lady's-slippers, together with many others. At regular intervals are dwarf pear and apple trees, loaded down with fruit; along the sunny side of a wall the clusters of golden, bursting chasselas, pendent from their supporting trellis, attract the buzzing wasps, while odd nooks and corners where nothing else will grow are filled with gnarled old trees bending

beneath the weight of those purple, egg-shaped plums that are known locally as *quoiches*. The place, of which my cousin Zelig proudly exhibits to me all the treasures, is fragrant with the odor of ripening fruit and autumnal flowers. The little lass, with her frank, friendly manner, her good nature, her simple dress of calico cut to fit loosely to the form, and leaving her entire freedom of movement, moves about amid her rustic environment as if she were perfectly at home in it. The honest fragrance of the old-fashioned country flowers, the purity of the running water, the wholesome flavor of the ripening fruits, all seem to have contributed something of their essence to make up this small personality. She knows every one of the plants by name, can tell me their medicinal or culinary properties, and explains to me how they grow and when is the proper season to set them in the ground. The extent and precocity of her horticultural acquirements excite in me more amazement than enthusiasm. I have lived thus far so entirely in the world of dreams and romance that my fair cousin's lore strikes me as too prosaically humdrum, as savoring too much of earth. Her words fall from her lips so naturally, however, and she speaks with such animation and simplicity, that the time does not seem long to me, and when we are summoned to the midday meal I wonder where the hours have gone.

How abundant and appetizing is the dinner in the cheerful dining-room, through whose open windows, together with the perfume of

the clematis, come the gentle murmur of the Saulx as it leaps its dam, and the mellow chime of distant bells ! What a difference here from the ostentatious parsimony of Aunt Mouginot's festive efforts ! Here everything is plain and of the best, and served with unstinted hospitality : the butter is fresh-churned, the cucumbers, sliced in a shallow vessel of graceful form, diffuse throughout the room a refreshing and salubrious odor. There is a sucking pig cooked in its own jelly, a fish taken from the stream that very morning, and to make the menu complete a huge tart made from those self-same purple plums that had made my mouth water in the garden. Your portion is not doled out to you by weight and measure as at the pharmacy ; the pleasure manifest on Mme. Delorme's face when one sends his plate to be filled a second time is evidence enough that she likes to see her cheer appreciated, and that puts one at his ease, so that when we rise from table we are all on terms of perfect amity with one another. After dinner I am shown the little bedroom that is to be mine. There is a bright-flowered paper on the wall, the iron bedstead is concealed under curtains of snowy whiteness, the single window looks out over the trees of the park. I forthwith conceive a tender affection for it, and Arsene Camus, as he says good-by to return to his parents, assures me that he will give his personal attention to the forwarding of my slender baggage just as soon as he gets back to Villotte.

Ah, the happy days that I spent at Jean-

d'heurs among those friendly people, within those hospitable walls ! It is only when I come to think of them in later days that I appreciate their delights as they deserve ; at the time they glide by so smoothly, so uneventfully, that I am all unconscious of their peaceful charm.

My cousin Delorme is busy at his factory all day long, his wife has her household cares to attend to, so that we children, Zelig and I, are at liberty to do pretty much as we please. Mme. Delorme is not a suspicious prude, like my aunt Mouginot, and is not afraid to leave us together. There is nothing strange or unusual in Zelig going about the neighborhood unattended, and under her guidance I explore the entire countryside. We chase butterflies in the broad avenues of the park, we fish in the Saulx—we even extend our excursions as far as the borders of the wood of Trois-Fontaines. I tell my cousin the story of my trials and tribulations at Pestel's, my grievances against Aristide and my admiration for little Alice. On this last head my flow of eloquence is inexhaustible, and Zelig listens with the patience of an angel, without the slightest indication of jealousy, although I expatiate even to weariness on the little Parisian's grace, beauty and intelligence.

“ She must be very pretty ! ” she merely observes with a sigh. “ I wish I were like her. ”

Zelig is not at all like little Alice. She has not her refined elegance, neither has she her queenly manners nor her wealth of imagination.

She has received her education at the sisters' school, and her reading has been confined to the catechism and the Gospel. And yet it is but fair to confess that her company is never tiresome ; her conversation abounds in interest, although it is confined to a limited range of practical topics. Sometimes I attempt to enlist her interest in my unsubstantial tales, to take her by the hand and lead her with me on an excursion into the fabulous realms of fairy-land, but she cannot follow me for long without fatigue, her smooth forehead wrinkles under the mental strain, and with an impatient shake of the head she exclaims :

“ What use is there in bothering our heads about things that have no existence ? ”

“ Yes, but it is good fun to make believe those things might come true—”

“ It is a great deal better fun to think of things which happen for fair and about which there is no nonsense : how the grain of wheat sprouts, how the chrysalis becomes a butterfly, how the blossom is transformed into the fruit—”

There is no arguing with her when she adopts this matter-of-fact line of reasoning. My cousin Zelig is the unyielding foe of all deceit and subterfuge ; she turns a deaf ear to fiction of every sort, and in this respect she appears to me far inferior to little Alice. But then again, she is so frank, so affectionate, so good-naturedly companionable that I forgive her her shortcomings in consideration of the tender admiration she displays toward me.

We chance one morning to be in a piece of woods belonging to the Delormes, in which it is the superintendent's habit to set snares for small birds. We have advanced but a little way among the underbrush when my ears are saluted by the loud squawking of a bird in distress.

"Hurry up," says Zelig, "a silly jay has let himself get caught in a *raquette*."

We start off on a keen run for the spring near which the traps are set. Sure enough, Zelig had guessed aright: a jay has entered the treacherous inclosure, the bolt has flown back, releasing the fateful cords, and he is a prisoner; he squalls and struggles so violently that the network of stout twine lies flat upon the ground. In my eagerness to be first to assert possession of the captive I rush forward and incautiously lay hands on the big, blue-plumaged bird, who revenges himself by pecking at me so fiercely that the blood spurts from my finger. Responsive to the howl of rage and pain that I emit as if in emulation of the jay, Zelig comes running up, kneels on the ground, relieves me of my enemy that she casts aside among the grass and weeds, having first pitilessly wrung its neck, then takes my bleeding finger, raises it to her lips and sucks the wound.

Under the gentle pressure of her lips it seems to me that the pain subsides as if by magic, and I am careful not to move, so great is the pleasure I experience in her novel mode of treatment. At last my cousin tears her handkerchief in

strips, dips them in the spring and binds up the wound.

“There,” she murmurs, “it doesn’t hurt now, does it?”

“Not a bit, Cousin Zélie; your lips have charmed away the pain. But doesn’t the sight of blood frighten you?”

She blushes and replies: “They say that any one bitten by a bird runs the risk of being poisoned, and I thought it best to extract the venom from the wound while it was fresh.”

I am so filled with gratitude that I throw my arms about her neck and give her a kiss. I would cheerfully expose myself to the keen beak of a bird of prey if by that means I might have further experience of that delicious cure. Then we take up the jay, with its gaudy plumage all ruffled and disordered, and set out for home, silent and somewhat disturbed in mind.

And thus to me, living this free and joyous life of the woods and fields, with the bright September sky above my head, the days fly by with frightful rapidity. The first thing I do each morning on opening my eyes in the little bedroom that overlooks the park is to consult my calendar, and I see with terror that the moment is drawing very near when I must say farewell to my good friends of *Jeand’heurs*. Already the days are perceptibly growing shorter, the increasing coolness of the mornings tells that the end of summer is at hand. It is not the idea of returning to Villotte that terrifies me, so much as the prospect of languishing as a captive at Pestel’s; I feel that I shall never be

able to submit resignedly to be immured for long, long months behind those prison walls, with the schoolmaster's left-handed blessings and stiff doses of arithmetic for my sole consolation. This forbidding outlook embitters my last days of liberty. I become nervous and distraught, like a bird that beholds a hawk circling high in air and takes fright before it is in danger. The Delormes, who are as kind to me as can be, notice my trouble, and the clear-sighted superintendent seems to have divined its cause.

We are seated in the stone-floored porch one evening—he, Zelig and I—chatting on one subject and another while waiting for supper to be announced, when my cousin, having watched me in silence for a while, abruptly speaks :

“You are not as cheerful as usual, Jacques ; what's the matter, do you find it tiresome here ?”

“Not a bit of it, cousin — quite the reverse !”

“Then it is the idea of going back to school that is worrying you ?”

I nod my head without replying further.

“I admit,” he continues, “that it is not very pleasant for one of your age to be shut up behind brick walls. The open air would be a great deal better for you. I proposed once to your uncle Mouginot that he should let me bring you to Jeand'heurs and put you into the paper mill to learn the business. But it seems the Mouginots want to make a scholar and a fine gentleman of you. If that is also your way of thinking there is nothing further to be said.”

While he is speaking I direct a furtive glance at Zélie's face and catch her calm, clear eyes bent on mine with an expression of anxiety, as if there were an answer that she desired above all things to hear me make, and she were waiting for it.

I know that at a single word spoken by me Cousin Delorme would renew his offer and do his best to obtain the Mougins' consent to my taking up my abode at Jeand'heurs for good. And yet I cannot bring myself to speak that word. Acting as usual under the impulse of my vanity and infatuated with my ambitious dreams, I decide that the little hamlet of Jeand'heurs is too small and mean a theater for a person of my abilities. I put firmer trust than ever in the glittering prospects evoked by the persuasive eloquence of Uncle Scipio, and I reflect, moreover, that should I connect myself permanently with the factory I would be forever parted from the adorable little Alice.

"Well, Jacques," M. Delorme urges, "speak up and tell us what you yourself would like to be!"

"I, Cousin Delorme? Why—I would like—I think I would like to go to Paris and make my fortune!"

My cousin shrugs his shoulders and says no more. At that instant I hear a deep sigh escape the lips of some one close beside me. I turn my head, and it seems to me that somehow Zélie's blue eyes have suddenly become bright and humid, as if the dews of evening had deposited some of their moisture there.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE nearer the time approaches for the re-opening of school the greater becomes my antipathy to subjecting myself again to the clutches of the vulturine Pestel. On the 30th of September Cousin Delorme receives a curt note from Uncle Victor, which he reads to me after supper. The pharmacist informs us that the school will open its doors on Monday, October 3, but that the boarding pupils will be allowed to take up their quarters there on the day preceding this date. He therefore instructs me to start for home with bag and baggage in time to reach there during the forenoon of Sunday.

Having made myself acquainted with the subject matter of this missive I pensively seek the seclusion of my chamber, where, resting my elbows on the window-sill, I watch the rising moon as she shows her silvery disk over the trees of the park. Already she is almost a perfect circle, and I mournfully assure myself that by the time she is at the full I shall be languishing a captive in Pestel's jail. The night is very still, and in the nocturnal calm distant sounds are plainly audible. Far, very far away in the west, over toward the wood of Trois-Fontaines, I hear a dull rumbling, succeeded by an ear-piercing whistle. It is the train for Paris, slowing down to make its stop at Sermaize station. It starts again, and I listen sadly to the receding roar as it flies

away through the darkness of the night toward the great city, where it will arrive by to-morrow's early dawn and where dwell Uncle Scipio and little Alice. I cannot help envying the fortunate travelers who are being whirled away by the mighty magician, steam, when all at once a most audacious reflection flashes across my mind: "What is there to prevent me from being one of those fortunate beings? All I should have to do would be to get away from here by daybreak, so as to reach Sermaize in time to catch the morning train. I am a good walker, and if I should take a short-cut through the wood of Trois-Fontaines I could easily cover the distance to the station in four hours. A third-class ticket from Sermaize to Paris won't cost me more than twelve or thirteen francs, and the louis d'or that kind Grandma Pechoin gave me is still in my pocketbook, unbroken. I would land in the capital at five o'clock in the afternoon and run straight to Uncle Scipio's. I am sure he would be glad to see — did he not tell me, twice over, to come to him if they ill-treated me? Now, there can't be the least question about it, *I am ill-treated*. Their plan to shut me up as a boarder at old Pestel's is a wicked action and a confounded shame, so that I have a perfect right to leave the Mouginot-Pechoins, who are hateful tyrants, without beat of drum, and seek assistance and protection from Uncle Scipio."

I turn this fine project over in my mind during a great portion of the night, and the next

day, while Zélie and I are walking by the Saulx, I devote even more serious attention to it. My only scruple in the matter is that I shall have to leave the Delormes surreptitiously, without telling them of my plans and thanking them for their cordial hospitality. But it is quite plain that it won't do to confide my project to the cousin; I know what his ideas of discipline are, and, for all the kindness he has shown me, he would infallibly take steps to bring my scheme to naught. Still, the notion of giving leg-bail, as if I were no better than a common malefactor, is extremely irksome to me, and finally I light on a compromise which seems to me as if it ought to silence the reproaches of my conscience.

Zélie has noticed my preoccupation, and as we are sauntering slowly homeward in the declining daylight she questions me with sisterly solicitude:

“What ails you, Jacques? Why don't you speak to me?”

The twilight hour is propitious to confidences; under its influence I muster up courage to speak and relieve myself of my scruples.

“Zélie,” I blurt out, abruptly, “I am going to trust you with a secret, but first give me your solemn word that you won't tell it to a living soul.”

“To no one?—not even papa and mamma?”

“Not even to your parents.”

She comes to a halt, and opening her limpid eyes to their full extent, fixes them inquiringly upon my face:

“Is it anything bad?”

I hesitate for a second, then answer in an off-hand air:

“No, no, it is nothing bad. Will you promise not to tell?”

“I promise.”

And half in joke, half in earnest, she repeats the childish invocation with which the boys and girls of our neighborhood have been accustomed to attest their oaths from time immemorial:

“Boule de feu, boule de fer,
Si je meus j’irai en enfer.”

“There, are you satisfied? Now let’s hear your secret.”

“Zelie, I have made up my mind never to go back to Villotte again.”

My cousin’s blue eyes beam with delight.

“Really and truly,” she exclaims; “you will stay here with us?”

“No—not precisely. I mean to go to Paris.”

And in a few brief words I unfold to her my plan for decamping the next morning without sound of trumpet or drum, taking the train at Sermaize and going in quest of my uncle Scipio. The bright, blue eyes are clouded now, an Zelie’s smooth brow is puckered with regretful creases.

“You will be grieving papa and mamma,” she gravely answers, “and besides that, M. Mouginot-Pechoin will say that we did not look after you as we should have done. Oh, Jacques, don’t do it; I beg you, don’t!”

“I must, Zelie; I have not the courage to go

back and face Pestel. Besides, Uncle Scipio told me that I was to be sure to come and hunt him up if they ill-used me—and, to speak frankly, the people at the pharmacy make life a burden to me. I feel that I *must* go. Remember your promise to keep my secret!”

“Yes, but I am sorry that I promised.”

“Be silent, for my sake. Say nothing, at least until to-morrow afternoon. By that time I shall be safe and sound in Uncle Scipio’s house, and you can tell your parents all. Say to them how it grieves me to cause them trouble and how grateful I am for all their kindness. And you, too, cousin, I thank you for your friendship. I shall never forget the happy days I have spent at Jeand’heurs.”

The tears are brimming in Zelig’s eyes, just ready to overflow; with a sudden impulse I throw my arms about her neck and give her a long, tight hug. Our return to the paper mill is made in silence, and all during supper both our hearts are so heavy that we find it impossible to speak. At dessert M. Delorme produces a bottle of sweet wine and fills the small glasses round.

“Jacques, my boy,” says he, “to-morrow winds up your holiday. You know the way to Jeand’heurs now, and I hope we shall see you here again. To-night the toast is: To your good health, and the pleasure of another visit from you.”

I am conscious of a great sob rising in my throat, and in order to preserve a steady face make haste to touch glasses with my neighbors

and toss off my wine. I despise myself for my baseness in deceiving my good cousins, and allege a headache as a pretext for hurrying off to my room. Zelig lights me to the staircase, and as I am about to close my door I signal her a last adieu, placing a finger on my lips as a warning to her to be silent.

Once in my little room, which is flooded with silvery moonlight, I proceed to stow my pockets with the various articles that I intend to carry with me: comb, soap, toothbrush, my knife and a ball of twine. I make sure that my twenty-franc piece, my sole fortune, is safe in its dwelling-place, my waistcoat pocket, then remove my shoes, and throw myself, with all my clothes on, upon the bed, so as to be ready to cut and run with the first glimpse of daylight. I know that Cousin Delorme's hour for rising is six o'clock sharp, and it is my wish to be well on my way by the time he is afoot. I drop off into a fitful, feverish slumber, and sleep only with one eye. The thought of the task I have assigned myself occupies my mind and serves as an alarm to rouse me. When I awake the stars are beginning to grow pale and a cock is crowing from a distant barnyard. Holding my shoes in one hand, I cautiously open my chamber door and descend the stairs, which give forth no sound under my catlike tread. Now I am in the corridor, but I perceive that the outer door is locked and bolted, and I remember that the massive key works stiffly in the lock and emits a most unearthly screech when turned. I feel certain that the

tell-tale sound will arouse my cousin, and stand gazing in discomfiture at the stout bolted door. The kitchen communicates with the garden, fortunately, and by that way I can gain the fields. Noiselessly I steal on tiptoe into the last-named room; the garden door is only fastened with a hook and staple, and a single leap lands me in the path, where at last I can venture to put on my shoes. Once in the fields, over which the darkness is brooding still, I run as fast as my legs will carry me, following the course of the stream, in haste to put as wide a distance as possible between the paper mill and me.

I have gained my liberty! but not yet am I relieved from all anxiety. In my headlong haste I have taken the first path I came to, never stopping to think that this course would entail the necessity of going on to the next village before I could meet with a bridge to enable me to cross the Saulx. I determine to retrace my steps and make a detour around the park wall, which will bring me out close to Robert-Espagne, a hamlet adjoining the wood of Trois-Fontaines. My heart quakes within me as I repass the paper mill and the Delorme's cottage; I climb the hill, and swift as an arrow fly down the slope on the other side. Not until I behold the smoke from the chimneys of Robert-Espagne rising above the autumnal mists do I pause for breath.

The village is already up and stirring, but as no one knows me there I push on boldly. Although I am horribly afraid of losing my

way I do not dare to apply to those whom I meet for directions, and my anxiety is not allayed until, coming to the edge of the forest, I encounter a guidepost bearing this legend : " Parish Road from Tremont to Sermaize."

The road, which has been repaved recently, ascends the acclivity of a wooded hill, at top of which it stretches away in a straight line over a level plateau, between trees which the early frosts have already begun to dye with ruddy hues. A pale sun shines out from among the vaporous clouds, touching their edges with tints of silver, and in the distance I hear the deep tones of a church bell striking the hour. Seven o'clock ! As the train is not due until eleven and the station is distant but a trifle over six miles, there is no need for me to hurry, but there is a sort of low fever on me that will not let me stop to rest or beguile my eyes with the beauties of the landscape. There seems to be a voice within me that keeps calling : " On ! on !" just like the Wandering Jew. And yet it is well worth my attention, this pretty woodland road, bordered on each side by a great forest where the thrushes are calling to one another from the branches of the mountain ashes. But this morning the forest has no charms for me ; my ears are closed to the piping of the thrushes, I have no eyes for the mountain ashes with their gay clusters of scarlet berries ; my every thought is concentrated on the station at Sermaize, on whose red roof alongside the railway tracks I long to set my eyes.

The wooded plateau begins to fall away toward the west. The intervals between the trees gradually become wider, and soon my vision is gladdened by the sight of the town, perched on the hillside and displaying its long rows of houses built of wood and plaster; then I have glimpses of the Saulx winding among the meadows in snakelike curves, and finally the station, in its cramped position between the canal and river, heaves in sight.

As I pass through Sermaize the sight of a baker's shop and the alluring odor of hot bread remind me that I have had no breakfast. I could eat something with great satisfaction, but to buy a penny roll would have to change my gold piece, and I fear the baker might suspect me of having stolen it. I put a bridle on my appetite and decided to wait until I have small change.

And now I am at the station, where an electric bell is clanging away intermittently, keeping up a most tremendous pother. I have still an hour to wait, and selecting the darkest corner of the waiting-room, proceed to ensconce myself there. And now fresh terrors assail me. Suppose my uncle Mougnot-Tupin, who owns a farm in the vicinity, should suddenly pop up before me? or Lawyer Jacobi, who sometimes strolls over to drink a glass of water from the Chalybeate spring at Sermaize? I cannot help thinking that the fresh arrivals scrutinize me too inquisitively as they come in, and the employees, too, seem to cast suspicious looks at me. I try to make

myself smaller even than I am. I pull my straw hat down over my eyes to conceal my features from the prying gaze of the curious, and the hands of the clock appear to move with heart-breaking slowness. A bell rings; the train is signaled. The gate flies open; I pass through hurriedly, and timidly depositing my louis on the brass-covered ledge of the ticket-seller's window, call in a husky voice for a third-class ticket for Paris. The girl fingers my coin, throws it down upon the counter to test its ring, and my heart beats like a trip-hammer under her piercing gaze. She deliberately hands me the ticket and my change, which I thrust hastily into my pocket without stopping to count it. I steal into the waiting-room, where two or three people from the village are occupying seats, and feel my distress and alarm increasing momentarily as I look from the window on the stir and bustle of the porters wheeling the passengers' luggage down the platform. A distant trembling motion that seems to proceed from the bowels of the earth now begins to be perceptible, then the air is rent by the shrill scream of the locomotive, and a moment later the train comes rushing and hurtling into the station with a noise like thunder, causing the ground to quake and the windows to shake and rattle. The doors are thrown open, and I make for a third-class compartment, into which some one shoves me in a state of complete bewilderment. The trainmen run along the platform and close the car doors with a bang, the whistle blows, and the train is off again.

Behold me at last in safety and en route for Paris ! The compartment is almost full, but I am still in a semi-dazed condition and scarcely bestow a look on my fellow-travelers. I tuck my precious ticket safely away in my waistcoat pocket, then count my change to see how much money I have left. The chink of the silver coins attracts the attention of my neighbor, who has been looking from the window ; he turns his head, looks me hard in the face, and in that brief moment I recognize my quondam schoolfellow, Lechaudel, alias Guigne-a-Gouche.

“ Why, it’s Jacques ! ” exclaims the carpenter’s son ; “ here’s a go ! ”

My face reddens at his salutation, and my first impression is one of distrust. I am uncertain whether I have any reason to congratulate myself on the encounter, and I have my doubts whether Guigne-a-Gouche will respect my secret and not betray me. It is with considerable anxiety, therefore, that I ask him how far he is going. I have lost track of him since he left Pestel’s school, and before renewing acquaintance am disposed to learn a little something of his proceedings in the interim.

“ Where am I going ? ” he replied with a bumptious air ; “ why, to Paris, of course ! My father has apprenticed me to a furniture manufacturer. I leave Villotte without regret, and you won’t see me back there for one while, I can promise you ! ”

This intelligence reassures me, and when he takes his turn at questioning me I tell him without hesitation that I am going on a visit to

my uncle Scipio Mouginot. "I suppose you have heard of him?" I proudly add.

No, Guigne-a-Gouche is entirely ignorant of Scipio Mouginot's existence; but as if to atone for his ignorance in this direction, he professes an intimate acquaintance with Paris, which he has visited once on a cheap excursion train. He seems to take pleasure in arousing my wonder by his lurid descriptions of the surprising things he has seen in the great city: the Palais-Royal, the Vendome column, a café-concert in the Champs-Elysees. He also obliges me with the names of the principal towns through which the train passes. He possesses a great fund of knowledge, does Guigne-a-Gouche; his loquacity and "cheek" hypnotize me in a measure, and with him at my side I cannot complain of the tedium of the journey. The stations flit by in swift succession. We reach one where we run in under a lofty glazed dome; there are locomotives crossing and recrossing one another in every direction, and I hear a man sing out: "Epernay, twenty minutes for refreshments!" I do not quite understand at first, but my comrade kindly explains that a stop is made at Epernay to give the passengers a chance to eat a morsel "off their thumb-nails."

"Aren't you hungry, Jacques?" he asks in a wheedling voice.

Am I hungry? My stomach is empty and clamoring to be filled; of course my answer is in the affirmative.

"In that case," he continues, "let's get

down and go to the refreshment-room. I'll stand treat."

I follow my generous companion, and presently we are in a large, handsome room, its walls adorned with immense plate-glass mirrors, with rows of little marble-topped tables covering the floor, and a long counter running down one side on which are arranged dishes of cold meat, baskets of fruit, plates of cakes, and good things of every sort in profusion. Lechau-del, as bold as brass, hails a waiter and orders bread, ham and grapes. The travelers are crowded thickly about the small tables, eating and drinking as if their lives depended on it. Now and then is heard the sound of a popping cork and the gurgle of an emptying bottle.

"Do you like champagne?" quoth Lechau-del with his mouth full of bread and meat.

Champagne! I have tasted it but twice, and then my aunt Mouginot was careful to see that the glass intended for me had a liberal allowance of water in it, but I retain a very friendly remembrance of the tempting, golden, sparkling wine. I give an affirmative nod of the head; two tall, tapering, creaming glasses are set before us, in which we dip our noses with great satisfaction as we finish our ham and grapes. But the best of things must have an end. A porter comes to the door of the buffet and shouts: "Passengers for Paris all aboard!" and at the same time a waiter plants himself in front of our table and laconically remarks:

"It is six francs!"

Guigne-a-Gouche nervously puts his hands in

his trousers pockets in apparent search for something there, then goes through the same performance with the pockets of his waistcoat, and all at once his countenance assumes an expression of pained consternation.

“*Sacristi!*” he murmurs, “I can’t find my pocketbook. I must have left it in my valise. Have you any money about you, Jacques?”

The waiter fidgets impatiently and eyes us suspiciously, the passengers are streaming from the room, and the bell rings out its final warning. I am frightened, and extracting from my waistcoat pocket my small remaining store, throw down six francs upon the marble of the table, and then we scuttle back to our compartment.

“Much obliged!” says the wily Guigne-a-Gouche as he resumes his seat in the corner. “We had a good breakfast, anyway! Next time it will be my turn to pay.”

There is no further mention of the pocketbook, and I recognize the fact that I may as well charge up the cost of our breakfast to account of profit and loss. It begins to dawn on me that my ex-schoolmate has been too smart for me, and that Guigne-a-Gouche’s methods for easing other people of their superfluous cash are very much the same as they were in the old Pestel days. The conviction that I have been made a dupe of, in connection with the prospect of landing in Paris with only thirty sous to my name, operates to put a very decided damper on my enthusiasm; my admiration for my resourceful companion has evaporated with the

fumes of the champagne ; I sink into a reverie and suffer his coarse pleasantries to pass unanswered. The villages flash by, appearing and vanishing in the enframement of the car window as if borne on the wings of the whirlwind ; some one sings out their names, one after another : “ Chateau-Thierry, La Ferte-sous-Jouarre, Meaux ; ” then the face of the landscape undergoes a decided change and we go dashing onward through parks and gardens and past trim white villas. The train makes no stops now ; it buzzes past the stations amid clouds of dust and steam ; then the engine begins to shriek more loudly and at more frequent intervals, there are high turfed embankments on each side of the road with revetments of stone, and I make out Lechaudel’s voice saying :

“ Here are the fortifications — we are at Paris ! ”

My heart beats violently and I am seized by a mysterious, undefined terror. A thought that had not occurred to me previously rises to my mind and completes my agitation :

“ If Uncle Scipio should chance to be from home, what would become of me, a stranger in this great city, with thirty sous as my sole resource ? ”

I turn to Lechaudel and ask :

“ You know all the streets of Paris ; can you direct me to the Faubourg Saint-Martin ? ”

Guigne-a-Gouche, who is engaged in extracting from beneath the seat the famous valise in which he keeps his pocketbook, favors me with a very indefinite reply, and I suspect he is not

much better posted than myself in regard to the topography of the capital. The train crawls onward at diminished speed and comes to a halt under the great glazed roof of the station; every one alights, and Lechaudel, first negligently wishing me good luck, slouches away and is lost among the crowd. Yielding to a pressure that I cannot stem I move forward and presently emerge, in company with my fellow-passengers, upon a long courtyard thronged with cabs, omnibuses and bustling, hurrying people. It behooves me to take steps to find where my uncle lives. Greatly agitated, I address myself to the man nearest me:

“Can you tell me, please, where is No. 118 Faubourg Saint-Martin?”

“Turn the corner to the left; the faubourg will be right before you.”

“I wish to go to M. Scipio Mouginot’s—the inventor of the new process for making cloth—”

The gentleman makes no reply and hastens away toward a carriage. I remain standing in my tracks with mouth agape, deafened and dazed by the shouts of the porters, the cracking of whips, and the roar and rattle of vehicles.

A drawling, rancorous voice sounds close at my ear: “You want to go to 118 Faubourg Martin?”

I turn and behold a tallow-faced youth of eighteen or so, clad in a long blue blouse and wearing a cap on his head.

“Yes—is it far from here?”

"A goodish bit. Come along, I'll show you where it is."

I follow this obliging young man, who is chewing the butt of a half-smoked cigar and from moment to moment squirts copious streams of saliva against the walls. He takes me through a labyrinth of dark, narrow streets, where the pavements are covered with a glutinous layer of mud, and where I run up against men who have the air of being overwhelmed with business. The course seems longer and more intricate than I had supposed, and I have a notion that my guide is protracting it for some malicious purpose of his own.

"Have we much further to go? Do you know M. Scipio Mouginot?"

The young man of the blouse looks at me with a contemptuous expression of pity, then, pursing his lips to eject a fresh and most portentous jet of saliva:

"What does he do for a living?"

"He has invented a new sanitary cloth for the army. He's my uncle."

"Can't say as I know him. See, there's the faubourg, and your uncle's roosting-place can't be far away."

We have debouched into a broad thoroughfare where the noise of the drays and omnibuses is deafening. Twenty paces further my guide stops. "Here's No. 118."

I look up and behold a tall, dirty-yellow structure with a wide, arched entrance opening into two inner courts; on the ground floor, to

right and left of the entrance-way, are shops of not particularly inviting appearance. Each floor has its own separate signboard, extending across the entire width of the façade. It is not the least bit like the idea I had formed of Uncle Scipio's princely mansion. I turn, in a somewhat discomfited frame of mind, to my self-sacrificing friend, and overwhelm him with thanks.

"That's all very fine as far as it goes," the obliging young man impudently replies, "but there's my time and trouble. One franc."

My face is scarlet and I feel like a detected sneak-thief as I put my hand in my pocket and extract from it my last twenty-sou piece; I deliver it to the young man of the blouse, who, to show his contempt for such trifling matters, tosses it in the air, and catches it as it comes down, then goes off whistling.

Sadder and wiser than I was, I pass in under the archway, on one side of which I notice a small window surmounted by the inscription: "Address your inquiries to the concierge." I take off my hat politely and request to be directed to M. Scipio Mouginot's residence.

"Second court, right-hand staircase, entre-sol!"

In order to fix them in my mind I keep repeating mentally these instructions, which are thrown at me as one throws a bone to a dog; I cross the first court, down the middle of which runs a filthy, malodorous gutter that serves to carry off the waste water from the sinks of the numerous tenants. My consternation is greater

even than it was when I emerged from the station, and I ask myself how, in the name of all that is decent and respectable, Uncle Scipio can live in the midst of this population of laborers.

Here is the right-hand staircase in the second court at last—a wooden staircase with grimy, muddy steps, leading upward to a landing on which are piled bales on bales of hemp that emit an acrid, pungent odor. A door confronts me bearing the legend: “Hemp and Vosges linens. Entrance to warerooms. Turn the knob, *s. v. p.*”

I turn the knob. The picture that presents itself to my vision is a great room illuminated by the dull, uncheerful light from the court, a long counter on which are piled rolls of linen, and behind this counter a lady of some forty years, whose hair is beginning to be tinged with gray, whose face is sad and sweet, engaged in measuring off a remnant. In a voice faltering from disappointment and anxiety I ask once more:

“M. Scipio Mouginot?”

“M. Mouginot is out, but he will be back presently. Will you wait for him?”

“Oh!—Why, if it isn’t Jacques!” exclaims a little girl, whose inquisitive, pretty face suddenly pops out from behind a desk, where, perched on a tall stool, she has been busy writing.

I give a great start, and my anxious face is illuminated by a smile, for in the little girl with the long apron of black lutestring I have recognized little Alice

CHAPTER IX.

LITTLE Alice descends from her lofty perch. She is taller than when I saw her last; her slight form is slenderer still and still more graceful; her wavy hair falls as of yore in billowy masses about her pale face, in which the coal-black eyes shine with the brilliancy of diamonds. She has lost nothing of her old queenly manner; it is with a gesture almost royal in its grace that she gives me her hand and conducts me to her mother, the lady of the counter. The latter receives me affably, casts on me a kindly, rather mournful look, and questions me with polite reserve, having first asked me to be seated.

There is a momentary pause in the conversation, during which I cast a discontented look about the wareroom, with its rows of shelves, the rolls of linen, the counter and the racks filled with great, leather-bound account-books. I am still hopeful that this shop is but an offshoot from the main factory where the army cloth is made; but I have my fears. Were it not for little Alice's presence I should be woefully out of countenance here in this salesroom for Vosges linen, in company with this strange lady with the melancholy face.

"You intend to remain in Paris a few days?" Alice's mother inquires.

"No, madame, I came here to stay for good."

"What, so young! Are not your folks afraid

to send a boy of your age to shift for himself in the streets of Paris? ”

“I shall not be unfriended, madame, having my uncle Scipio to counsel me.”

“Of course—of course,” the lady rejoins, with a nod of the head. “Have you a place in view? ”

“I am expecting—that is, I hope my uncle will secure me one.”

The conversation flags again. The gray-haired lady sighs and little Alice stares at me with wondering eyes, in which I think I can detect a gleam of compassionate irony. To break the awkward silence, and also to let the ladies know that I am not a little provincial numbskull, ignorant of everything, I start the conversation again on the topic of Scipio Mouginot’s enterprises:

“Is my uncle as well pleased as ever with his prospects? I suppose the manufacture of the army cloth is going on at full blast by this time? ”

Little Alice bites her lips and darts a look of vexation at me; her mother shakes her head and her sad face is overspread with an expression of profound melancholy.

“Your uncle has had a great deal to contend with for some time past,” she replies. “Ill-disposed people have played him a scurvy trick and caused him to suffer deeply. Unless he mentions the subject of his own accord, therefore, you will please have the kindness not to speak of the military cloth in his presence.”

If some one had planted a stinging blow right

in the pit of my stomach it could not have taken away my breath more effectually than does this answer. It upsets me so completely that my voice fails me. My mouth is dry, my eyes become dim and I can feel my features contracting. There is a ringing in my ears; I seem to hear the crash of my gorgeous castles in the air as they tumble in ruins about me. I behold myself compulsorily returning to Villotte, my expedition a pitiable failure, and the tears are ready to burst from my eyes.

At that very moment there is a sound of footsteps on the stairs, accompanied by a gay tune hummed in a cheerful voice; the door is thrown open, and Scipio Mouginot walks briskly into the room.

My uncle has not changed: he preserves his youthful mien and carries his head as high as ever; he has under his arm the inevitable portfolio stuffed with papers, has on his back the usual fawn-colored spring overcoat. But the leather cover of the portfolio is chafed and white in spots, as if it were suffering from an attack of the mange; the spring overcoat is not as immaculate as it has been once, and its skirts fall in lamentable folds and creases about its owner's legs. My relative casts a swift look about him that embraces the whole shop, perceives me sitting disconsolate upon my chair, lets slip an ejaculation, lays aside his portfolio and comes toward me with extended arms.

“You here, Jacques? What a pleasant surprise!”

Of my uncle's surprise there is no room for

doubt; whether the surprise is pleasant or not I would not be so certain. When he has embraced me he falls back a step or two, looks interrogatively at Alice's mother, and his face seems more expressive of embarrassment than delight.

"How is it that you chance to be in Paris?" he asks, with a grave inflection in his voice.

"Uncle, I could not remain longer at Villotte; I was too wretched there. I ran away, and, as you told me I was to do, am come to put myself under your protection."

I deliver my little speech as rapidly and as forcefully as I can for the emotion I am laboring under; at the same time I rivet my eyes anxiously on Scipio Mouginot, who listens to me reflectively, puckering his lips meanwhile in a brown study over the problem presented to him so abruptly.

"Hum! hum!" he murmurs; "so you have cut loose from my brother Victor, have you? Perhaps you have acted a little impulsively—not that I am going to refuse you shelter; I never go back on my word. But you have dropped in on us at an inopportune moment, confound it!—a moment of transition, to tell the truth, and of laborious transition, at that."

"Uncle, I should be very sorry to be a burden; on the contrary, nothing would please me better than to be of service to you." And I add timidly, and I fear a little disingenuously: "Suppose you try me by giving me a situation—in your offices!"

Scipio's lips are puckered as tightly as ever;

he strokes his chin and wags his head doubtfully :

“In my offices, you say? For the time being the force is reduced to those who are absolutely indispensable. To be quite frank with you, my dear boy, the cloth business did not pan out as it promised to do. No—the idea was a happy one, but it had the ill-will of a red-tape administration to contend against, and failed. The ministry deceived us, the ministry cheated us shamefully—patriotism has ceased to exist in France!—so I have had to shift my musket to the other shoulder and mark time in my tracks for a while. But there is no reason for despair, the Lord be praised, thanks to the energy of that lady whom you see behind the counter there and to whom I must present you—Mme. Clemence, widow of my old partner Saintot, a brave woman who has sustained me in my struggles with an affection and a forgetfulness of self that are more than human—”

“Monsieur Mouginot!” Mme. Saintot blushing and interrupting in a tone of entreaty.

“No, no, my dear madame,” my uncle goes on, insistently, “you must let me tell this child the facts as they are. In Mme. Saintot, Jacques, you behold an angelic creature, a woman of head and heart, who has suffered from our common misfortunes almost as much as I myself have suffered, but has risen triumphant above them all and is now strengthening my hands while waiting to strike another vein.”

While Scipio Mouginot discourses thus a faint smile plays over the sad face of Alice’s mother ;

her fine brown eyes, in which affection and submissiveness are as plainly legible as in those of a faithful dog, become humid and are turned on my uncle with gleams of grateful admiration.

“Now, ladies,” continues Scipio, extending his arms toward Mme. Clemence and her daughter, “this is the important question which presents itself to us. Jacques, here, invoking the faith of promises made and soliciting my protection, has come and thrown himself into my arms. Am I to send him away, or should I, notwithstanding the difficulties of the present moment—a moment of transition, but toilsome, laborious transition—should I, I say, keep my brother’s son at my side and afford him my assistance in hewing his way to fortune?”

Mme. Clemence looks down on me with pitying eyes.

“Whatever you do will be well done, Monsieur Mougnot,” she replies in her low, sweet voice.

“Of course we ought to keep him!” exclaimed Alice, in her decided, imperious little way.

“Truth from the mouth of babes!” remarks my uncle, approvingly. “That settles it; Jacques is to remain. What is enough for three will suffice for four. To-morrow, my boy, I will write to my brother Victor, but to-day shall be devoted to rejoicing. Mme. Clemence, we must kill the fatted calf and have a little better dinner than usual to celebrate the arrival of our dear Jacques. Will you be so kind as to

attend to the domestic and culinary arrangements? ”

Mme. Clemence silently inclines her head, passes into the adjoining room and returns with a basket on her arm. She puts a broad-brimmed straw hat on her head and leaves the house to purchase the provisions.

In her absence my uncle questions me as to the manner of my flitting and shows me through the apartment, which last is not a labor requiring a great deal of time. Succeeding the ware-room is a small dining-room with a tiled floor, which communicates with a doll's house kitchen, dimly lighted from the corridor ; then comes a room where every nook and corner is filled with old account-books and samples of all kinds of merchandise, which serves the double use of bedroom and private office. And that embraces all.

While my uncle is expatiating on the advantages and conveniences of his modest “temporary ” quarters I speculate, not without considerable misgiving, where he can intend to bestow me. Perhaps he thinks I have a room at a hotel? This feeling of uncertainty as to where I am to lay my head worries me exceedingly, and I would like to exchange a few words on the subject with my new guardian ; but, on the one hand, the disillusionizing process I have gone through since my arrival has made me tongue-tied, and, on the other, little Alice's presence intimidates me. We have found our way back to the dining-room, where Mme. Clemence's daughter is engaged in setting the

table. She performs her duties with the self-reliant air of one who feels herself at home and knows just where to look for everything. In a few words she informs me that her mother occupies another apartment in the house, but that they have a table in common with my uncle, who has associated himself in partnership with them for the purpose of trading in Vosges linens; only the business is conducted in Mme. Clemence's name out of regard for Scipio Mouginot's susceptibilities, whose self-respect will not permit him to sink to the position of a retailer.

Sick and sore at heart with my mortifying fall from the dizzy height of my gorgeous dreams, my appearance must be somewhat that of a soul in purgatory. I sit sulking in my corner, while Alice flits in and out, from the table to the buffet, from the buffet to the kitchen, placing a fork here, wiping a glass there, arranging salt-cellar and oil-jug symmetrically, all with the airy grace and lightness of a bird hopping from twig to twig.

As regards Alice, too, disappointment is my lot. In the first place, she is "little Alice" no longer; she has already acquired the easy manners and the gravity of a young lady grown. Again, it does not seem to me that my unlooked for appearance has produced on her anything like the effect I was expecting it to do.

While Alice's apparition at Villotte and her brief visit there assumed in my eyes the proportions of a great event, I was for her but one of the many incidents of her journey; I played

the secondary part of a chance-met acquaintance, whose face is forgotten almost as soon as seen in the whirl of Parisian gayety and distractions. In the solitude of my country home not a day passed without my thinking of her; but Alice, in noisy, pleasure-loving Paris, doubtless had so many things to occupy her that she in a certain measure forgot me. I can see it in the way she looks at me and speaks to me; not that she is not perfectly polite and affable, but her manner toward me is one of *insouciant* though amiable indifference.

I am revolving these considerations in my mind when Mme. Clemence returns with her purchases. She deposits on the buffet a box of sardines, a fowl purchased ready roasted at the restaurant, a terrine of foie gras, some grapes and three silver-sealed bottles. The doorbell rings soon after and there appear successively a woman with oysters on the shell and a white-jacketed caterer, who produces a dish of smoking-hot pork cutlets, garnished with gherkins. In the twinkling of an eye all these good things are arranged in their proper order on the board, the wine is uncorked, the sardines are transferred to a shallow china dish and the foie gras is placed as a pendant to the roasted fowl.

“Take your places!” cries my uncle, who has exchanged his frock for a house-coat, and proceeds to seat himself at Mme. Clemence’s side. “Faith, Jacques, you’ll have to take pot luck with us; we were not looking for the pleasure of breaking the bread of hospitality with you this evening.”

I am amazed by the excellence and profusion of this dinner improvised at half an hour's notice, and which would have cost Mme. Mouginot-Pechoin a whole day of preparation. Can this be what they call pot luck? For people in pecuniary difficulties the fare does not seem so very poor.

Mme. Clemence helps me to a dozen of the oysters. I have never tasted them before, and the sight alone of the strange bivalves inspires me with disgust. Not wishing to appear too countrified, however, I make a desperate effort and gulp them down; but there is such an expression of misery on my face as I turn them in my mouth that irrepressible Alice bursts out in a fit of laughter. Scipio Mouginot has recovered his good humor and makes frantic efforts to bring the rest of us up to his pitch of gayety. Mme. Clemence alone preserves her seriousness; her faint smiles are evidently forced. She and my uncle, supposing I have my hands full with getting rid of my oysters, exchange mysterious remarks of which I do not understand a word.

"Did you see those gentlemen?" Mme. Clemence asks, with an anxious air.

"Yes—or rather I saw the lawyer; but that's sufficient."

"Well, what is the result?"

"You need not worry. We'll make a little reclamation—something to shut Plumerel's mouth—and that will end the matter."

Scipio Mouginot's answers appear to have a reassuring effect on Mme. Clemence, and she

heaves a sigh of relief. Her face is pensive still, but she takes more part in the conversation and smiles more unreservedly at her partner's drolleries. That worthy man seems to enjoy a perfect appetite and a serenity that nothing can ruffle. With his napkin tucked into the bosom of his waistcoat and spread across his manly chest, with his unclouded brow, limpid eye and smiling lips, he swallows his oysters with supreme content, sips his chablis like a connoisseur and talks like a book, never losing a mouthful. Politics, the stock market, free trade, the relations of capital and labor—on all these questions does he discourse with great spirit and eloquence, and he solves them with the same facility with which he would cut you off a wing of the fowl.

As for Mme. Clemence, Alice and me, we have no knowledge of political and economic science, but we are none the less dazzled and fascinated by the facile flow of language of the silver-tongued orator, and we all drink in his words with equal admiration. Is it to be attributed to the terrine of foie gras or the chablis première? Is it to the fecundity of the uncle, the white wine or Alice's brown eyes that I owe my intoxication? I cannot tell, but the *aplomb* of my self-appointed guardian begins to give me more backbone, my hopes revive, like flowers after a shower of rain, and at sight of Scipio Mouginot, so mettlesome and gay, so superb in his serene self-confidence, even in the midst of his reverses, my trust in the future comes back to me.

When at dessert, therefore, they all unite in a libation to welcome me to Paris, it is with a barely perceptible dash of *insouciant* bravado that I touch my glass to the glasses of my entertainers, and especially to that of little Alice. I am so bewitched by her smile, I feel the feverish influence of the great city already so strong upon me, that I myself fall into the very self-same sin of indifference and forgetfulness with which I was so lately reproaching the daughter of Mme. Clemence. I no longer remember that at Jeand'heurs, only twenty-four hours ago, other glasses clinked to the toast of my speedy and safe return; I think no more of the friendly faces of Cousin Delorme and his wife and Zelig. They seem to have receded a long, long distance, and to be lost among undefined, shadowy shapes. I have no eyes for any but my new hosts, and my induration of heart is such that I am not even aware of any ingratitude.

We find it so enjoyable sitting around the table and Uncle Scipio is in such good spirits that we take no heed of the flight of time. My uncle suddenly pulls his watch from his pocket.

"If it isn't ten o'clock! Jacques must be tired after his journey and we mustn't keep him—"

"But I think, Monsieur Mougnot," Mme. Saintot gently remarks, "that your nephew came straight here from the station and was expecting to stay with you."

"I see, I see," says my uncle. "You did not take a room at the hotel, Jacques?"

On my replying in the negative, he adds:

“And your baggage, where is it?”

I inform him that my wardrobe is at Jean-d'heurs, and that I have all my fortune about my person. He remains sunk in thought for a moment, then, turning to Mme. Saintot:

“Where the deuce are we to find a place for Jacques to sleep in, madame?”

The lady advises that a bed be made up in the wareroom.

“Ha! *parbleu*, yes; in the wareroom!” laughingly exclaimed Uncle Scipio. “There will be no lack of linen sheets!”

In a little less than no time the table is cleared, the cloth removed and the preparations for my lodgment are proceeding. Every one bears a hand to help in the good work. My uncle takes one of the mattresses from his bed, Mme. Clemence goes up to her apartment and comes back with a load of sheets and blankets, and the outfit is spread in guise of bed on the counter in the great shop; a roll of linen will do me for a bolster and little Alice lends me her pillow. In less than half an hour everything is ready. Mme. Saintot and Alice wish me good-night and ascend to their rooms, and Uncle Scipio and I are left *tete-a-tete* in my dormitory.

“Come,” says he, setting the candlestick down upon a chair and giving the improvised bed a punch or two to test its softness, “you’ll sleep well enough there, provided you don’t kick too much, for if you do, you will be liable to wake up and find yourself on the floor. In any case, one night isn’t a lifetime, and in the morn-

ing we'll look around and see if we can't find something more comfortable for you. And so, good-night, Jacques. To-morrow we'll have a serious talk about your affairs."

He retires to his chamber and I undress hastily, blow out my candle and climb to my bed, assisted by a chair. My couch is rather hard, and the roll of linen is a poor substitute for the downy pillow of my little pallet at Jeand'heurs ; still, I experience a sense of deep satisfaction as I stretch my weary limbs, but sleep is slow in coming to me.

The clatter of the omnibuses and the dull rumbling of the market-gardeners' wagons shake the windows of the faubourg at every instant. I can hear the strumming of a guitar and the cracked voice of a strolling musician who is bellowing his romances in the wine shop on the ground floor. The gas-jets in the court cast a pale, unearthly light through the shutterless windows on the rolls of linen and heads of flax that crowd the shelves. I am feverishly excited at the thought that I am in Paris ; the least of the unaccustomed sounds causes me to start in alarm on my narrow counter, whence I am in momentary fear of tumbling off into the dark void. At last, however, thanks in part to the heady odor of the hemp, my noddle presses more heavily on little Alice's pillow, and, thinking of her, I fall asleep.

CHAPTER X.

I AM abruptly awakened next morning by the noise of a milkman's wagon coming in from

the railway station with its clattering, jangling load of cans filled with the lacteal fluid. I rub my eyes and wonder where in the world I am; when I attempt to stretch my limbs I am surprised to find them a little stiff and sore, and then at last it occurs to me that I have slept on the hard planks of the counter. I have no means of ascertaining the hour, but the activity of the court and the noises rising from the street inform me that the morning must be pretty well advanced, although the light that penetrates the windows is still strangely dim. I jump down from my counter and proceed with all haste to make my toilet, fearing lest customers or Mme Clemence may come in and surprise me in primitive attire. In twenty minutes, having washed my face, combed my hair and dressed from top to toe, I steal noiselessly to the door of the dining-room and listen. Everything is as still as a mouse in that quarter; Uncle Scipio is evidently still sound asleep. In the regions above a like silence appears to reign. At this time of the day, I say to myself, the pharmacy at Villotte has already had many customers. Clearly, people are later risers at Paris than in the country. To kill time I open one of the windows, and leaning on the cross-bar, watch the proceedings of those in the court below.

The inhabitants of the other apartments are apparently earlier in their habits than my uncle. A woman with a gaudy kerchief about her head and in down-at-heel shoes is sweeping the stone pavement, an old-clo' man is hanging

out his stock in trade of soldiers' trousers and old boots, a binder is arranging on his window-sill a series of volumes tight-locked in a wooden press; noises of every kind come from the half-open windows and mingle confusedly in the heavy air of the court like the swarming of a hive of bees: the rat-tat-tat of a cobbler soling a pair of shoes, a locksmith who sets your teeth on edge with his grating, creaking files, the monotonous tick-tack of sewing machines, the whole forming a concert like an army of locusts in a field on a summer day. While I am watching the spectacle of laboring Paris awakening to its daily toil I suddenly become conscious of a hand laid on my shoulder. I turn and find myself face to face with my uncle, with clean-shaven face, just buttoning his jacket.

"Good-morning, Jacques," says he, in a loud, cheerful voice. "Up already? An excellent habit, that of early rising. Did you sleep well? Yes? Good. Now that we are alone tell me your story, and how you came to leave my brother Victor's pharmacy."

I make a clean breast of it and own up to my dispute with Aristide and the subsequent assault, urging in mitigation the wrath of the Mougnot-Pechoins, my dread of being incarcerated at Pestel's and my flight from my cousin's paper mill. He listens with a smile on his lips and rubs his hands, and when I have finished my narrative makes answer:

"Well, we'll see if matters can't be arranged. I will write to Victor telling him of your arrival here and offering to be responsible for your edu-

cation. From the way things have turned out I am inclined to think he will accept my proposition."

I thank my uncle profusely and assure him of my eternal gratitude.

"You owe me no thanks," he goes on in his patronizing way; "I am only following the dictates of my feelings. Come, we'll cut it short and talk common sense. You can see for yourself that we are too scant of room here to keep you with us, so I shall be forced to put you — temporarily — to school, where I hope you will work hard and pick up enough knowledge to enable you to be of help to me in working out the new vein that I shall infallibly strike before I am much older."

At hearing the word "school" my face elongated perceptibly. What! can it be that I have found little Alice only to lose her again immediately? Did I flee from the wrath of vulturine Pestel only to be imprisoned in a jail that may be even yet more unendurable? My uncle, beholding my chapfallen expression, makes haste to exclaim:

"Don't be alarmed! it won't be a place like that hole of old Pestel's. The Literary and Scientific Institute, where you will be received as a pupil on my recommendation, is controlled by an old friend of mine, a man of parts and liberal ideas, who has substituted improved methods of instruction for the old-fashioned, time-worn routine of the universities. His system is original, his erudition unlimited; his establishment is the gathering-place of all that is most

distinguished among the youth of France and foreign lands. Congratulate yourself on this most fortunate opportunity ! Evariste Cornevin is a man of a million, and Mme. Cornevin is a mother to the boys. Thanks to me, you will be treated as if you were their own son."

I try to look pleased, but from somewhere away down in the depths of my inner being I feel a vague sensation of melancholy rising, as the fog rises and overspreads the meadows in the mornings of October.

"Come," my uncle continues, "don't look so glum ; you will have no reason to complain. Besides, you will come every week and spend your Sunday with us. And so that is settled ; I will go and write my letter to Brother Victor, we will have breakfast, and that done I'll go with you to Cornevin's school. The weather is fine, we'll go afoot, and you'll have a chance to see a good bit of Paris on the way."

Mme. Clemence and Alice make their appearance while he is uttering these last words. My uncle makes them acquainted with his plans, then retires to his chamber to compose the epistle for the Mouginot - Pechoins. Mme. Saintot, first cheering me with a few kindly words of encouragement, devotes herself to getting the breakfast ready, and I am left alone with Alice.

She has donned her lutestring apron once again, and, softly crooning to herself, is arranging the books and writing materials on her desk. My eyes follow her movements with silent admiration, and my heart grows heavy

within me at the thought that I am so soon to leave her. Something tells her, doubtless, of the look that is fixed on her so wistfully, for she turns her eyes on me with a sudden movement.

“Why do you wear that look,” she says with a mischievous smile, “as if you had lost all your friends? Do you take it so to heart that you are going to board with the Cornevins? There is no reason why you should; they are very nice people, and you won’t find time hang heavy on your hands.”

“Do you know them?”

“I should say I did. Mother takes me to their soirees now and then; it is very amusing; there is music and dancing; the young men are all invited, and every one enjoys himself.”

The idea of a school where dancing is allowed quite upsets all my notions of scholastic discipline; still, there is a certain degree of comfort in it, and I ask Alice if she shall go to the Cornevins’ soirees when I am at the institute.

“I cannot say,” she replies, with a slight movement of the shoulders. “Mother has a great deal to worry her just now, and has no heart for dancing; but aside from that you are to come here every Sunday, and we will try our best to divert you. When the weather becomes finer we will go to the country, and you shall see how pleasant it is among the woods of Montmorency.”

“Is it pleasanter there than in the woods of Villotte?”

“There’s no comparison!” she replies, with something of a disdainful air.

Her irreverent way of speaking of the woods of my native land seems to me to border on ingratitude, and I retort on her:

“And yet, you seemed to like it pretty well down there in the fallows of the Petit-Jure, among the ferns!”

“What are you talking about with your ferns and your fallows?” she asks, with an air as if I were talking Greek to her.

“Why, the fallows where we sat one July morning and listened to the larks singing, and where you told me about Vivien—”

“Oh, yes,” she murmurs with a vague smile. But I can see very clearly that she has no remembrance of the matters of which I speak. She has quite forgotten this detail of her visit at Villotte, and her obliviousness chagrins me bitterly.

We bolt our breakfast summarily, like men of business; then Uncle Scipio dons his spring overcoat and I put on my straw hat. The moment of parting is come. Mme. Clemence gives me a look from out her moistened eyes and cordially shakes my hand. I step up to Alice and give her a kiss; and I, too, feel somehow as if it would do me good to cry. As for her, prettily tossing back her raven curls, she speaks words of comfort to me:

“It won’t be long, Jacques! You are to come and see us next Sunday, remember!”

The stirring events of my recent existence have caused me to lose run of the days of the week, and in a stupid kind of way I falter :

“ When will that be—next Sunday ? ”

Alice gives way to laughter.

“ Why, in a week from now, of course, to-day being Sunday. Wait a moment, I will give you something to help your memory.”

She rummages in her desk and extracts from it a miniature calendar.

“ There,” she says, with another burst of laughter, “ if you will only consult this you cannot make a mistake, for the Sundays are marked on it in letters of red.”

I put Alice’s precious souvenir carefully away in my breast pocket and we are off.

The sky is overspread with thin, fleecy clouds, but the pavements are dry and we strike a brisk gait as we descend the faubourg, where there are currents of clattering drays and hurrying pedestrians circulating in opposite directions. The never-ceasing procession of vehicles, the countless army of by-passers, the shrill cries of the street venders, the tall houses, all conspire to distract and daze me.

There is a spot where the flood that comes rolling and tumbling down the faubourg encounters another flood, even yet more tumultuous, which fills the width of a broad cross-street, planted with handsome trees, and my uncle shouts in my ear :

“ The Boulevards ! ”

With infinite pains and labor we push our way through this roaring human tide that

appears to have no end, through the serried rows of vehicles, and come out upon a long thoroughfare that seems no less populous and busy than the first. The crowd is everywhere in this huge city, at whose swarming multitudes I begin to feel a sensation of terror and alarm. This street, which is dark and narrow and some half a league in length, suddenly discharges us into a luminous, wide space. The sun shines out from behind the silvery clouds ; in the tempered light I behold a great river pouring its green tide between tree-bordered banks, and on each side, among groves and clumps of verdure, a far-reaching perspective of lofty mansions and of palaces ; above the roofs rise towers, slate-covered domes, the tapering spires of churches. We cross a monumental bridge, the chief ornament of which is an equestrian statue, and Scipio Mouginot, with a sweeping, majestic gesture, says for my information :

“The Quais and the Seine.”

Now we have reached the other bank. On, on we go, through a labyrinth of narrow, tortuous streets, where other crowds are swarming in the midst of the same eternal uproar of vehicles and ear-splitting cries. I am so bewildered that I can distinguish nothing clearly ; a dull headache causes me to feel as if my temples were bound with a hoop of iron, and I find it difficult to keep up with my indefatigable uncle, who drags me along by the hand. At last we enter the main street of Montrouge. The houses are parted by wider intervals, the

numerous gardens give to the dwellings a more airy look, and I breathe more easily.

“Here we are,” my relative announces.

He has stopped before a wall of dressed stone on which is a straggling display of big black letters, and I read :

SCIENTIFIC AND LITERARY INSTITUTE.

E. CORNEVIN, *Principal*.

Scipio Mouginot opens a postern door situated to the right of the great gateway, holds a brief parley with a concierge, and conducts me across a courtyard adorned with a few beds of sickly-looking flowers to a square structure on which the former inscription is repeated, this time in letters of gold. Above a two-leaved door in the entrance hall are these words : *Principal's Office*. My uncle knocks, and, not waiting for an answer, enters.

At the sound of our steps a gentleman who is comfortably ensconced in a fauteuil before a desk, in the middle of the room whose walls are quite concealed by books, wheels about and rises impetuously :

“Mouginot !”

“Cornevin, old fellow !”

The two friends shake hands effusively, while I stare with might and main at the principal of the institute.

Evariste Cornevin has not the pedantic solemnity or the forbidding aspect of my old pedagogue Pestel. He is a man of middle age, of average height, quick and nervous in his movements, with a scanty reddish beard and pale-

blue eyes that seem lost in continual reverie. He is in slippers, wears a cinnamon-colored suit, and his long face with its thoughtful forehead is surmounted by a cap of yellow leather.

“How is business with you?” Uncle Scipio inquires with an accent of solicitude, “and how is my dear, kind friend, Mme. Cornevin?”

“Thanks, my wife is well, as is your humble servant; as for the business, it is jogging along in a leisurely sort of way, *lento pede*. There seems to be no decided change since the re-opening, but I have made up my mind to be at the big drum and advertise for public favor. See, here is the proof of an ad. for the great newspapers.”

He unrolls a long strip of white paper on which is printed in large type :

Literary and Scientific Institute, under the management of Evariste Cornevin, Master of Arts. Pupils prepared for the special schools. New method of teaching the dead and modern languages. Ten years of success.

“Very good indeed,” declared my uncle. “The only way of reaching people nowadays is by advertising. They can’t fail being attracted by that.”

“That’s just what I think,” M. Cornevin ingenuously replies, “only the fourth page of the big journals cost money, and I see a difficulty before me. The funds are low.”

“See here,” insinuatingly says Scipio Mougi-

not, as if suddenly struck by a very bright idea, "let me have your ad. I know of an agency that will take hold of the business on reasonable terms and give you plenty of time. Meantime here is another pupil for you."

"You *are* a friend, Mouginot, you are!" exclaims Cornevin, favoring me with an inquisitive and smiling look. "Who is it?"

"My nephew."

Cornevin continues to smile, but rather uneasily.

"Yes, my nephew," continues my uncle, warming up, "and as dear to me as a son! A boy who will do you credit, my dear fellow! A budding intelligence that gives promise of blossoming into a wondrous flower."

"Scipio Mouginot's nephew," M. Cornevin courteously rejoins, "cannot help but be a person of distinction."

He interrupts himself in his little speech, extends his hand to me, takes a pamphlet from his desk and thrusts it on me:

"Here, my lad, take this and amuse yourself with it while we talk business. It is the list of studies."

I go and take a seat in a corner where I can look over the pamphlet at my leisure. It informs me that up to the present time no one has succeeded in teaching the dead languages to children, and that Cornevin will pledge himself, within the space of two years, to make them talk Greek and Latin fluently, as well as several of the modern languages. While I cudgel my brains to get at the meaning of the

method briefly set forth in the *List of Studies*, M. Cornevin and my uncle are conversing in the embrasure of a window. They have forgotten my presence and talk in their usual tone, and, willy-nilly, fragments of the conversation come to my ears.

“You are aware that the school does not furnish the trousseau,” says M. Cornevin, rather timidly. “As for the terms of payment, I will make them easy for you.”

“Cornevin,” cries my uncle, with a superb gesture of disinterestedness, “your terms are mine. Let us put aside these paltry money questions.”

“No, no!” quickly rejoins the principal; “on the contrary, we will take them up now and dispose of them, so as not to have to refer to them again. Come, what say you to a thousand francs and the trousseau—is it too much?”

“My dear friend, intellectual culture is something on which it is impossible to set too high a price. Make what terms you will, the boy will still be your everlasting debtor.”

“Payable in advance at the commencement of each quarter,” M. Cornevin gently intimates.

“That’s all right. Only, if you have no objections, I am going to settle your account in kind. My till is empty just at the moment, but I have some superfine Vosges linen in stock from which you can supply yourself at discretion; an establishment like yours is always wanting sheets and pillow-cases.”

M. Cornevin does not go into ecstasies over the proposition ; he is silent and thoughtful ; it seems to me even that his face wears a slightly disgusted look. Whereon Scipio Mouginot adds:

“ I can also let you have some most delicious cheese, just in from Gerardmer. It makes an excellent dessert for breakfast.”

“ Very well,” the schoolmaster finally says, “ I will accept your offer, subject, however, to the ratification of my minister of finance, Mme. Cornevin, that is to say. Come along ; we’ll go and present your nephew to her.”

We pass into an adjoining room, where I am introduced to Mme. Cornevin. She is a little, shriveled, dried-up woman, in a faded blue dressing-gown ; she is as wrinkled and pimply as a grape-vine leaf after the first frosts of autumn, but is extremely vivacious ; her voice carries in its accent a reminder of the sunny South, and her kittenish airs are still further accentuated by a crop of little false curls that rest in frizzly disorder on her forehead. It looks as if she were accustomed to lead her husband by the nose, but she is a good-souled little body and gives a cordial welcome to Scipio Mouginot, who has doubtless circumvented her with his wiles, as he does all women. She gives me a friendly pat on the cheek, and with the readiness of a housewife whose linen closet is not overstocked accepts the proposed terms of payment for my schooling. As for the trousseau, my uncle has hopes that the Mouginot-Pechoins will do the right thing.

These matters of business having been once

arranged, M. Cornevin shows us over the house. The few boarders who have returned after their vacation have taken advantage of its being Sunday to go into Paris to see the sights, so that the institute is deserted. No mercy is shown us: dormitories, study, recitation-room, parlor—all, we are forced to visit. Last of all we inspect the dining-room, on the white paper and woodwork of which the servants have left the imprint of their grimy hands. An oblong table with an oilcloth cover stretches nearly the entire length of the apartment, and around it some twenty chairs are arranged in a symmetrical festoon.

“This is the refectory,” says M. Cornevin with an absent air of inspiration, while his wife fills four claret glasses with imitation sherry, “the banquet hall where thrice a day our young friends participate in the family repasts. The scholars eat with their masters; they are privileged to listen to their literary and scientific discussions and thus at the same time assimilate pabulum of mind and body. Mouginot, a drop of Malaga! I drink to the success of uncle and nephew!”

We all touch one another's glass in friendly salutation, then my uncle draws his watch from its pocket. His business has claims on him; he takes leave of the Cornevins, embraces me, and we accompany him to the street door.

“*Au revoir, Jacques!*” he exclaims. “Remember the motto of the imperial philosopher of old Rome: ‘*Laboremus!*’ and engrave it on your heart.”

I think he is gone and am returning to the house, slowly and sorrowfully, behind the Cornevin couple, when the postern gate is again thrown back and in the space between it and the casing Uncle Scipio's face appears; he waves his hand in a last farewell, again shouts: "*Laboremus!*" then vanishes for good.

The Cornevins have returned to their respective occupations, leaving me to my reflections in a garden situated behind the house, where there are some gymnastic apparatus. The garden, which consists almost entirely of lawn where the foliage of the tangled, uncared-for shrubbery is beginning to wither and die under the chill breath of autumn, presents no inapt image of my own sorrowful frame of mind. Like me, it is neglected and abandoned. Alone some purple asters, a few pale chrysanthemums, display their belated glories there, while the great willows strew the ground with their leaves of silvery green. The fog that lifted for a moment, only to return thicker than before, again conceals the cheerless sky, the surrounding objects are softened and distorted in the penetrating gray mist. A convent bell tolls slowly in the distance, and the soft, sad evening summons—it is my first time of hearing it at Paris—awakens memories of home. I am at Villotte once more, and the nostalgia of the loved native land lies heavy on my heart. The moisture rises to my eyes; then my thoughts turn to Alice. Her memory pervades my being, sweetly soft and soothing as the sound of the distant bell. I take from my pocket the

calendar, where each red letter is the token that I shall see my little friend again, and tenderly kiss the small square of cardboard on which Alice's brown eyes have rested.

CHAPTER XI.

A WEEK after taking up my abode with the Cornevins I see little Alice once more and spend a delightful Sunday in her company. My uncle takes us to the Louvre and the Luxembourg, we have a good dinner at a restaurant, and when I go back to school, where I am beginning to feel a little more at home, it is with a braver and more cheerful heart. I have written my good cousins, the Delormes, an affectionate letter apologizing for my abrupt manner of leaving them. As for the Mouginot-Pechoins, Uncle Scipio's prediction has proved true; they were not sorry at heart to be rid of me, and everything in that quarter has been arranged most amicably. In a letter abounding in lamentations over my innate wickedness and ingratitude my uncle Victor has resigned his authority into his brother's hands, and has promised, on behalf of self and the Mouginot-Tupins, to be responsible for two-thirds of the cost of my education. My modest wardrobe has been forwarded from Villotte and added to here, so that as regards apparel I am now nearly on an equality with the other boys. Uncle Scipio has carried out his agreement like a little man; a day or two after my installation a porter wheels his push-cart up to the door and turns over to Mme. Cornevin his

freight of Vosges linen, in addition to which there are numerous pine boxes containing odoriferous Gerardmer cheese. There is nothing left for me to do now but obey my uncle's injunctions and reduce to practice the motto of the imperial philosopher of ancient Rome: "*Laboremus!*"

My will is good enough, but the work comes hard to me at first. The methods pursued at the Cornevin Institute are strange to me and throw me off the track at starting. They have put me in the second division, the primary class, and I can see myself now as I looked when I entered the great recitation-room to participate in the lesson in mathematics, given by M. Oscar Fencherot, who appears to be the professor-of-all-work of the school.

In the vast, naked, whitewashed room, where the only furniture is a raised platform, a black-board and two or three rows of benches, eight pupils, ranging between twelve and fourteen years of age, are scattered here and there in various easy, lounging attitudes. Almost all of them are foreigners; there are four Roumanians, two Servians and a creole from San Domingo; the French nation is only represented by a young relative of Mme. Cornevin and me. On the platform our teacher, Oscar Fencherot, rears his tall, lank form, interminably long as a day of fasting, leaner than any herring, lost in his poor old shabby clothes. His face is always scrupulously clean-shaven, the cheeks pale and sunken, the eyes unnaturally bright; the long brown hair, thrown

carelessly backward on the neck, reveals the ample proportions of his forehead. His arms are like the sails of a windmill as they revolve nervously about his head, and he has a trick of scanning his sentences that seems to give him much satisfaction, rolling them from off his tongue in monotonous, sonorous rhythm. This cadenced declamation seems to act as a spell on the scholars ; it hypnotizes them ; little by little they commence to wink and blink, like people dozing off, and it is only by stuffing themselves with sweetmeats and candy that they manage to ward off slumber. As for me, I open eyes and ears to their utmost extent. I do my best to understand, but the words I catch are unknown mysteries to me. With the remembrance of the Pestelian method still fresh in my mind, I have preserved an invincible repugnance for the study of mathematics—first, because I have been so many times flogged and “kept in” on its account ; next, because I never could make head or tail of it. But, alas ! the problems of the Villotte pedagogue were clear as crystal compared with the enigmas that Fencherot presents to us. At the Cornevin Institute mathematics are styled “the philosophy of numbers,” the equality of triangles is disguised under the appellation of “Eurythmy of triangular figures,” and everything else is on the same scale of grandeur. After yielding my attention for half an hour it seems to me that my head has attained the dimensions of a pumpkin and is ready to burst. From time to time, fortunately, M. Fencherot inter-

lards his unattractive formulas with digressions on the modern poets and recitations of fragments of poetry, which would seem to have but a remote connection with the science of numbers. These excursions from the arid realm of figures rest me. I find a charm in the rhythmic swing and music of the verse, and as on the whole I display more attention than the majority of my classmates, I am high in the good graces of the professor.

After the lesson in mathematics comes a recitation in Greek or Latin, when M. Cornevin explains his method of inculcating the dead languages in two years.

At noon the bell rings for breakfast, and the two divisions file in to enjoy their repast in the white dining-room in company with M. and Mme. Cornevin, M. Fencherot and another teacher, active and lively as a squirrel, who has charge of the class in drawing. We are a scant twenty all together, and the foreign element predominates.

The meals are abundant, the fare is exquisite ; it is evident that the Cornevin household have a weakness for good living, and we profit by their frailty. There is one queer thing, however, and that is the extraordinary variations in the bill of fare. There will be weeks and weeks when our alimentary regimen is based on salmon ; at other times we have turkey stuffed with chestnuts until we are satiated. In the early days succeeding my arrival the appearance on the table of the Gerardmer cheese in its round pine box was hailed with marks of the

liveliest satisfaction ; the young epicures would lick their chops in pleased anticipation at sight of the rich, creamy paste with its tasty seasoning of caraway seeds. When two weeks have elapsed, however, even the least fastidious among the boarders have begun to tire of Mme. Cornevin's unwearying assiduity in serving the caraway-flavored cheese for dessert at the morning and evening meals, and when the pine box is produced growls of indignation, not loud but deep, are heard about the oblong table. The worst of the matter is that through the thoughtless chatterbox of a cook, doubtless, the two divisions have learned that this inexhaustible supply of cheese has its fountain-head in my uncle and serves to pay my tuition and board bills. Each day at recess, therefore, I am overwhelmed with humiliating reproaches ; I am made responsible for the monotonous sameness of the dessert and find myself the target for cruel gibes. There is one boy in particular, a big Wallachian with olive complexion and black crinkly hair, who follows me up wherever I go, taking me by the arms and flattening me against the wall, screaming at me in his gibberish :

“I am zeeck of your old djeeze ! You tell your onkel to djauch it or I djoke ze wind out of you !”

To escape their angry menaces I abandon the playground and sadly take refuge in a disused room. One afternoon, when the more than usually *high* condition of the confounded Gerardmer has brought down a storm of objurga-

tions on my devoted head, I have sought the haven of the study-room, where the quiet is unbroken save for the gentle, drowsy purring of the stove. As I enter the room, not yet recovered from my dismay, I behold long-legged Oscar Fencherot seated by the fire and engaged in scribbling on scraps of paper. At sight of me he thrusts his lucubrations into his pocket ; one of the slips falls to the floor, however ; I pick it up, and before returning it to him cast my eye over the manuscript page where lines of unequal length succeed one another, divided off four by four. I hand the scrap of paper to M. Fencherot, exclaiming :

“ It’s poetry, isn’t it ? ”

“ Yes,” loftily replies the professor, who has taken a liking to me and deigns to honor me with his confidence, “ it is poetry.”

“ And it was you who composed it, Monsieur Fencherot ? ”

“ It was I. To comfort me amid the cares of stern reality I evoke the Chimera who sits by the gate of the temple of Art, and the magic words that fall from her lips I set to a strange and unknown rhythm.”

“ Oh, please, please recite them to me ! ”

Manifestly pleased with my request, he consents to read me the product of his muse’s inspiration, and in a solemn, almost sacerdotal voice, declaims the following ;

“ Je reviens du pays des vertes nostalgies,
Ou mon Amie au blanc visage lilial
Sourit de son sourire auguste et filial
Aux roses d’autrefois, par les couchants rougies.

“ Je reviens de l'exil glauque des longs sommeils,
Ou derriere la vitre embrumee et que gerce
Le givre, une musique obsedante me berce,
Comme un chant tres lointain tombant des cieux
vermeils.”

I do not understand a word of it, and yet I am in an ecstasy. Is it some latent bent toward rhythm? is it the sonorousness of the words that charms my sense of hearing, and have those vocables, as Fencherot styles them, the gift of inoculating me with the poetic frenzy? I feel myself transported into a new, another world, with a boy's ingenuous candor I admire my teacher's bathos, and in enthusiastic terms I tell him of my admiration:

“It is fine, fine! What a fortunate man you are, and how I wish that I could do as much!”

Oscar Fencherot smiles and draws himself up proudly.

“Not only must one be endowed with the natural gift,” he replies, “but still more he must acquire the art of prosody. I will teach it to you if you wish.”

I accept his offer gratefully. I have a feeling that could I but write in verse I should find my way more readily to Alice's heart.

From this time forth M. Fencherot devotes his hours of recreation to initiating me into the mysteries of prosody: he instructs me in the art of forming new, telling and unaccustomed rhymes, he shows me how inversion and the movable cæsura may be employed to give pliancy to the verse and how it may be beautified by metaphor and the use of appropriate and novel imagery. Thanks to this daily inter-

course a close friendship springs up between us. M. Fencherot makes me the depositary, not only of his ambitions for the future, but also, a much longer list, of his failures and disappointments. He tells me that the unceasing grind of his daily duties is addling his brain, and likens himself to Apollo guarding the flocks and herds of Admetus.

“With a talent like yours,” I remark, “I should think you ought to attain fame and fortune at a single bound.”

He smiles ironically and gives a look at his old worn boots.

“As for fame,” he replies, “I will say nothing; but fortune!—A poet trusting to his productions to support him nowadays would starve. I took a position with Cornevin merely to keep the breath in my body. If I don’t handle any coin of the realm here I at least have a place to lay my head and something to put in my stomach.”

“And yet, M. Cornevin ought to pay you a good salary?”

“He *ought* to pay me, it is true, and perhaps he will some day, for he is an honest man, but I have yet to see the color of his money.”

This is news to me, and I express my surprise. From the style of living at the institute I had supposed the Cornevins to be people of means.

“It won’t do to trust to appearances,” Fencherot replies. “Cornevin, and I respect him for it, is more a man of imagination than a man of business. Before he adopted this

business he was a publisher ; unfortunately for him he writes, and has a craze for seeing himself in print. Now you must know that a publisher who publishes his own books is in pretty much the same case as a pastry cook who should take to eating his own cakes and pies—he ruined himself by that venture, and his school, I fear, is not a paying speculation—he feeds his boys too well. But what use is there talking ?—people in our sphere don't know how to calculate. Cornevin has a heart of gold, and his wife has the head of a canary. For all that they are nice people.”

Certainly the Cornevins are “nice” ; there is no denying that, and if we boys do not learn much at their academy, we are not a prey to moping melancholy. Once a week the great double doors between the salon and dining-room are thrown back as far as they will go and Mme. Cornevin, in a flaming scarlet gown, her redundancy of false locks bound up *a la Grecque* with fillets of bright red ribbon, receives her guests, who come by omnibus from every quarter of Paris. The vestibule is transformed into a cloakroom for the occasion ; the pupils, curled, perfumed and dressed in their Sunday best, act as ushers and make themselves agreeable to the ladies.

The constituent elements of these hebdomadal gatherings afford a curious study. There are bald old gentlemen, ill at ease in their enormous stiff-starched collars and wearing voluminous white cravats, who entertain the company with antediluvian jokes and anecdotes ;

ladies no longer young, in "loud" gowns which, like their owners, have seen better days—these are writers for the so-called society journals; young and hairy poets, in black velvet sack-coats, who talk like Oscar Fencherot, cannot be lured away from the vicinity of the marble mantelpiece and recite unintelligible sonnets in a sepulchral voice; pallid, angular young ladies, in poor, shabby little gowns, with white gloves that have unmistakably been to the cleaner's, who torture the piano with length of "variations." M. Cornevin recites a religious poem of his own composition called "The Death of Eve," in which Eve takes an insufferably long time to die. Mme. Cornevin sings and accompanies herself on the harp. We others, who have none of these gifts, act the part of the claque and are not chary of our applause. About eleven o'clock tea is served, with weak punch and cakes, then the chairs are pushed back against the wall and old and young, masters and pupils, devote themselves *con amore* to the obstreperous pleasures of an American quadrille. Every one capers and shakes the foot with a joy that is almost infantine. The little drawing-master in particular is noticeable by reason of his wild antics; when the figure called pastorelle is reached he has a stentorian way of shouting: "Hands all around!" that would infuse life and motion into one afflicted with ataxia. Hands are firmly grasped, and round and round, with constantly increasing speed and frenzy, the laughing, screaming dancers whirl in the little parlor

until the floor shakes beneath them. Sometimes the figure becomes a farandole, which goes bounding and leaping through dining-room, study, recitation-room and parlor, comes tumbling like a cataract down the staircase, pours through the corridors, and comes out, again triumphant, into the salon by way of the servant's stairs, while the poor young lady at the piano, who is more winded than the dancers, pounds away desperately on the old asthmatic instrument. At a quarter of twelve precisely every one dons his warm wraps, puts on his arctics, and hurries away on the double-quick so as not to miss the omnibus. And this little fete, of which the Cornevins never weary, is repeated regularly every Thursday.

Dearer to me even than these joyous Thursdays are the Sundays I spend in the linen shop of the Faubourg Saint-Martin. By eight o'clock I am up and dressed, and with joy in my heart I foot it to Scipio Mouginot's dwelling, where I am welcomed by the pale smile of Mme. Clemence and little Alice's majestic airs. Most times my uncle is not at home. He is very busy, Mme. Clemence tells me confidentially, very deeply engrossed in the inquiries he is making; he does not even allow himself to rest on Sunday. In company with the mother and daughter my day slips pleasantly away; sometimes, when Mme. Saintot has urgent work to attend to or is called away to look to the dinner, Alice and I are left alone. At such times I suddenly and unaccountably become dumb and am content to feast my eyes on her, not

daring to tell her how fair she is in my sight. One day when we are thus tete-a-tete together, however, and I am, as usual, speechless, I thrust my hand into the breast-pocket of my coat and nervously fumble with a sheet of English paper there, neatly folded four times across, on which I have made a fair copy of some verses produced by me with intent to celebrate the "lilial" beauty of Mlle. Saintot. I have profited by my teacher's instruction and am now able to construct verses that stand tolerably secure upon their feet, but, try as I may, am unable to attain my master's sesquipedalian style and redundancy of rhyme. My poetry seems to me to express too plainly what I feel, and then my style borders too closely on the elegiac, so Fencherot says, to whom I communicate my efforts.

Such as they are, I feel for them the love that a father feels for children that he has had difficulty in rearing. For an entire week I have read and re-read, with tears standing in my eyes, this production, which begins in this way:

"Seul au fond de sa demeure,
A toute heure,
Sous les saules du jardin,
Un amoureux reve et pleure ;
Son cœur saigne et son chagrin
Est sans fin."

There are twenty verses like the above. I considered them very happy while I was writing them ; now I dare not take the paper from my pocket ; it seems to me that I must die of shame should I attempt to present them to Alice. Time is passing, and I behold the mo-

ment close at hand when I shall have to go back to the academy without having shown my poetry to the object of its inspiration. At last I seize my courage in my two hands; as Alice is accompanying me to the shop door I stammer :

“I have something for you here—it’s poetry.”

And I slip my paper into her hand. She is about to open it, but I stop her with a terrified look.

“No, no! don’t read them until I’m gone!” I exclaim, and steal away with a face as red as fire.

All the ensuing week is spent by me in picturing to myself Alice unfolding my sheet of English paper, and in wondering how she will receive my verses. Will she be angry or will she smile? And what face am *I* to put on the matter when I go to see her on Sunday next? I can’t see how I am to withstand the calamity should she take it into her head to laugh at me.

The Sunday, object of my hopes and fears, comes at last. With feverish steps I traverse the breadth of Paris, I climb Uncle Scipio’s staircase with a beating heart, I am admitted—and learn that Alice is from home. She is visiting one of her girl friends and will not return till nightfall. Gloom and dejection forthwith replace the fever that was devouring me. I do not know what to do with my day, and remain the livelong afternoon with my nose over a book of which I turn the pages automatically without understanding the first blessed word. Alice returns at the dinner-hour, and my heart begins

to beat again. We are alone together in the shop, and while she is taking off her hat I manage to gasp in a faltering voice :

“ Did you read the lines I gave you last Sunday ? ”

“ Oh, your verses,” she replies, raising her hands to tie the ribbon of her hair. “ Yes, mamma read them to me. I think they are real pretty ! ”

And that is all. She passes without transition to another subject and tells me how she has spent her day. My bright fancies fade, dark shadows descend and fill the shop, and my evening ends in bitter disenchantment. Alice seems not to have the least idea that the verses were composed in her honor. I am beginning to suspect that I am nothing more to her than an ordinary schoolboy like the rest. She is thirteen now, and more than ever the little queen who suffered herself to be adored in Villotte wood. Her ideal is elsewhere, her aims are more exalted ; she is too handsome and too ladylike to care for an awkward, ill-clad boy. I tell myself these things over and over in my despair, but in spite of all I cannot help but love her.

While I am thus sighing, a hopeless lover, for the cold, fair one who will not comprehend me, while Scipio Mouginot is tramping the streets of Paris in quest of his elusive “ vein,” while Oscar Fencherot leads me deeper and deeper into the mysterious arcana of his nostalgic poesy, old Father Time is pursuing his relentless way ; weeks, months glide by and the

institute goes jogging on along its humdrum road, taking rough and smooth together as they come, through ups and downs, through weather fair and foul, like an unwieldy van that goes lumbering through the country with a load of strolling players, changing day by day, living from hand to mouth.

Notwithstanding the money spent in advertising in the great newspapers the public continues to be coy; it does not come forward and bite at the new methods, and the number of pupils decreases. Along toward the spring of my second year there are but eight of us in the big house in the Avenue de Montrouge. The discipline of the school is affected, and the variety of the menus as well. The salmon of our days of plenty is replaced by the ignoble cod, which we devour disguised by sauces of various kinds, and mutton stew, decorated with the more euphonious title of "navarin aux pommes," alternates too frequently with the salted production of the deep. It is only fair to add that neither Mme. Cornevin's good nature nor her husband's abstracted *insouciance* are perceptibly changed by these our days of trial. The principal seems always to roost so high that the cares and troubles of this sublunary existence pass under him unperceived. He has faith in his method, and that consoles for all. There are times, however, as he has not lost all relish for the good things of this world, when his face becomes momentarily clouded at sight of the inevitable navarin and the too persistent codfish *a la bechamelle*. Mme. Cor-

nevin still plays the harp and frizzes her brown tresses, but the Thursday soirees have been discontinued, the little drawing-master is seen no more about the premises and the concierge, more ornamental than useful, who used to be such an imposing object in his lodge by the great gate, has been discharged.

Some time after Easter the worthy couple take it in their heads to go and install themselves in a country house at Bourg-la-Reine that one of their absent friends has placed at their disposal, and to carry on the school there during the warm months.

“It will be wholesome for the boys, working in the fresh air,” says Evariste Cornevin.

But Oscar Fencherot has a shrewd suspicion that it was Mme. Cornevin who invented this device, in order to escape for the time being the demands of some unduly persistent creditors among her tradesmen. As this rustic mansion is not provided with the furniture necessary for a school, the principal's wife convokes us all one fine morning, teachers and scholars, in the great recitation-room and there addresses us in the following language as near as may be :

“My friends, in order that we may be supplied with everything we require when we reach the *villa*, we will take with us this morning two benches and a long table, which we will put on top of the cabs that we shall engage to take us to Bourg-la-Reine. As the servants have gone on ahead, however, I am going to ask you to lend a hand to get the things as far as the sidewalk of the avenue. There we will

hail the first vehicles that come along, and shall reach our destination down yonder in time for breakfast."

The proposition is received with great good humor, and we apply ourselves to our task with a will. Oscar Fencherot and three of the larger boys lay hands on the table and carry it out, while the smaller lads tackle the two benches; then we all plant ourselves in a row along the sidewalk and await the advent of the cabs. Here are two now, coming up the avenue empty at a jog trot; two cabs with a railing around the roof, the very thing we want.

M. Cornevin signals them and they pull up, but at sight of the freight, human and otherwise, offered them for transportation they shake their heads, lay the whip across the backs of their old nags and drive off with every evidence of disapprobation.

"Let's push on a little way ahead," says insinuating Mme. Cornevin. "The next we meet will be more obliging."

Table and benches are lifted to our shoulders once again and we descend the avenue processionally, the principal and his good lady bringing up the rear. Other vehicles pass and are hailed by Mme. Cornevin in her shrill voice, but the cabbies, as soon as the business is explained to them, decline the charter in terms more forcible than polite.

"Let's not give up the ship, my friends; come on!" Evariste Cornevin bravely cries. "All comes to them who only wait."

Yo, heave ho! The chattels rise in the air

once more and off we start again. The Arcueil Gate is left behind us, then the fortifications vanish in the distance, and now we are on the great Sceaux road, where it would be unreasonable to expect to find the cabs as thick as blackberries. As we press on the delusive hope of encountering a succoring vehicle grows small by degrees and beautifully less, but we have gone too far to think of retracing our steps and returning to the institute, and M. Cornevin spurs us on with voice and gesture :

“ *Mactote animo, generosi pueri !* Courage, my children ; one brief hour and we shall be there ! You shall stop and rest along the road, and your appetite for breakfast will be all the keener—”

We oppose a stout heart to unpropitious fortune and continue to journey onward as best we may. When the band grows weary we set the table down on its legs, the benches are placed in position alongside of and parallel to it, M. and Mme. Cornevin take their place at the top, and we seat ourselves below them in the shade, for all the world like two rows of onions in their bed ; then Oscar Fencherot, to beguile our waiting, recites in his cavernous voice a limping sonnet or a ballad, while the by-passers stop and stare to see a school, masters and pupils, sitting under an elm and gesticulating like maniacs. It is long past mid-day when we finally reach the *villa* of Bourg-la-Reine, stiff, footsore and hungry as bears.

This much-vaunted *villa*, buried among trees and famously dilapidated, is blessed with fear-

ful and wonderful arrangements for carrying off the water from its roofs. On rainy days the humidity makes it like a cistern; drops of water collect and trickle down the walls and the floors exhale an odor of mushrooms. But that is nothing; at the first ray of returning sunshine life there seems very sweet to me. I have the most delicious strolls through this country that is the paradise of nurserymen, which is like an immense fruit and flower garden with its great fields of roses, strawberries and raspberries whose fragrance perfumes the air. It brings to my mind memories of home and the land of my birth; the healthy odor of growing things, mingled with the appetizing smell of ripe fruit, affects me with a mild form of intoxication. The only drawback to my perfect happiness is that since our arrival at Bourg-la-Reine I am without intelligence of Alice and my uncle. Scipio Mouginot is too busy a man to write or come to see me. He is a quarter behind in his payments to the Cornevins, moreover, and is not particularly anxious to see them. Alice, doubtless, has plenty of other things to think of, and as for me, I have not a sou with which to pay my fare to Paris. Since our hegira to the country Mme. Cornevin, whose province it is to pay over to the boys their weekly allowance of pocket-money, has quite forgotten me in the hebdomadal distribution, and I, knowing that my uncle is her debtor, dare not speak to her on the subject. The professorial couple seem to be in no haste to return to their domicile in the Avenue de Montrouge.

About the first of August, however, word comes that the owners of the villa are about to return and resume possession of their property, and so we finally pack up our belongings and leave for town.

We are hardly more than back and settled again in the Avenue de Montrouge than the Literary and Scientific Institute is confronted with a fresh crisis. The meals become more and more scant; the nice little rolls that used to be served with our first breakfast are suppressed and their place supplied, by no means to our satisfaction, with dry bread. During our hours of study we can hear through the closed doors the vociferations of angry tradesmen storming and clamoring in the vestibule, and one morning, just as we are about to take our bowl of warm milk, the dining-room door flies open, a sheriff's officer, accompanied by two repulsive-looking men, presents himself, and, serving a paper on Evariste Cornevin, informs him that he is come to seize the furniture.

The principal's face becomes white as a sheet and he raises his arms heavenward; Mme. Cornevin falls back into her seat in hysterics. We all crowd around her, anxious to be of service; the scene is heart-rending in its desolation and confusion; the officer and his myrmidons, the only ones who are unaffected, impassibly seat themselves at the table before our untasted bowls of milk and proceed to draw up the proces-verbal of the seizure.

When the legal formalities have been com-

plied with and the first emotion has subsided, M. Cornevan summons us to the parlor and in a choking voice informs us that he is compelled to dismiss us to our homes :

“I have stood up and faced the gale of adversity as long as I could,” he cries, “but the ship is leaking in every seam and I am forced to lower the standard of the institute, that standard that I have ever borne so high ! My children, we will part and wait for happier days. Do those of you who live in Paris return this very morning to your paternal firesides. As for the others, I will communicate with those who have their interests in charge.”

I shake hands with the luckless principal, embrace Mme. Cornevin, who is going off into another fit of spasms, then sadly leave the institute that is given over to the minions of the law.

Still laboring under the terrible feeling of depression produced by this unforeseen catastrophe, I make my way rapidly across Paris and reach the house 118 Faubourg Saint-Martin in a breathless condition. In vain do I knock at the shop door ; no one responds. The bales of hemp have disappeared, the brass signs on the door-posts have been taken down. Deeply disturbed in mind, I descend the stairs again and learn from the concierge that my uncle, and Mme. Saintot as well, have moved. Since July 15 they have had their residence in the Rue de Conde, and Scipio Mouginot, absorbed in his complicated business affairs, has forgotten to notify me of his change of domicile.

CHAPTER XII.

THROWN as I am by Evariste Cornevin's failure on the tender mercies of Paris without a penny in my pocket, I make haste to hunt up my uncle at the address given me by the concierge in the Faubourg Saint-Martin. The Rue de Conde is not a long one, and I have no difficulty in finding the abode of Scipio Mouginot. It is a solid old stone mansion, having a spacious *porte-cochere* and high windows with little old-fashioned panes. The façade, formal and severe in style, has taken on those mellow tints that the fog and smoke of Paris impart to ancient structures. On the walls of the rez-de-chaussee, on each side of the wide entrance, great red signs are conspicuously displayed. I draw near and read the inscription, painted in prominent letters :

GALLEONS OF CASTRO SALVAGE COMPANY.

Joint-stock Capital : 20 Millions.

Under the archway, at the entrance of a dimly lighted inner court, is a porter's lodge that has the yawning appearance of a cavern. On making inquiry there I am duly informed that Scipio Mouginot resides on the floor above. I climb a monumental stone staircase with a wrought-iron handrail and find myself on the landing and confronted by a double door covered with green baize, above which a marble slab repeats in lettering of gold the inscription on the signs below : "*Galleons of Castro Sal-*

vage Company. Administrative Offices." I push open one of the leaves of this imposing-looking door and enter an antechamber of vast dimensions, floored with marble tiles and furnished with seats covered with green velvet, into which open other doors, also covered with green baize, also surmounted by signs in gold letters: "*Cashier.—Board Room.—Transfers. Manager's Office.*" There is an office-boy in blue coat and metal buttons seated in a corner behind a small table covered with an array of documents; he is reading the last number of the *Petit Journal*. I step up to him and inquire for M. Scipio Mouginot. The person in the tin buttons barely condescends to interrupt his reading and answer me, without raising his eyes:

"M. the manager is in consultation with MM. the directors. If you wish to wait for him, take a seat."

I sit down on one of the green velvet benches facing the door of the "board-room," whence proceeds a confused murmur of voices, and try to impart a little order to my thoughts. All that I have seen but now puzzles me and gives a violent fillip to my curiosity. So Uncle Scipio is the manager of this mysterious company that is to save the galleons? But what under the sun may a "galleon" be? The word is unknown to me and casts no light on my relative's position. Still, it appears evident to me that between these galleons and the vein that Scipio Mouginot has been looking for so long and industriously there must be a connection of some

sort, and judging by appearances the vein, if he has struck it, must be one of unusual depth and richness, for the old mansion in the Rue de Conde has a most promising air; it is not the least bit like the poor entresol of the faubourg, and the twenty millions of capital mentioned on the red signboards at the entrance tell of a business slightly different from that of selling Vosges linen. And so my uncle is at last on the high road to fortune! I rejoice most sincerely, for my own sake as well as for that of Mme. Clemence and little Alice. I wonder whether or not those ladies have apartments in the mansion. I would ask the office-boy about it if I dared, but he is deep in his newspaper once more and appears so uncommunicative that I have not the courage to disturb him.

While I am revolving these considerations in my head a good half-hour has elapsed, and behind the tight-closed door of the board-room the same voices are buzzing away as busily as ever. It is going on noon; the empty condition of my stomach makes me nervous and uneasy. I have a creepy sensation in my legs, my fingers drum involuntarily on the velvet seat of the bench. I count the panels in the woodwork, the tiles of the floor, and do my best to repress the yawns that are due as well to my mental anxiety as to the pangs of hunger. I am nearly at the end of my patience when at last the board-room door turns on its hinges, the voices sound louder and more distinctly, the office-boy hurriedly thrusts his newspaper into his desk and rises to his feet, and all at

once I am conscious of a band of five or six well-dressed gentlemen coming out, among whom I recognize Scipio Mouginot—but not the same Scipio that I saw last. This is a Scipio in whom prosperity has wrought a wondrous transformation, a restored, rejuvenated Scipio, with smooth, clean-shaven face, his manly form incased in an elegant black frock of stylish cut, and carrying under his arm a sumptuous portfolio of Russia leather that would not shame a minister of state. I am so utterly dumfounded and flabbergasted that I have not voice to make my presence known, but my uncle's piercing eye has descried me. He makes me a little patronizing gesture with his hand and keeps on conversing animatedly with the gentlemen of the board, most of whom wear gay-colored rosettes. The office-boy throws back both leaves of the outer door, there is a great deal of handshaking, and the directors vanish in the darkness of the corridor. Then my uncle comes to me, lays his hand affectionately on my shoulder, and in his clarion voice exclaims :

“How are you, Jacques? I was just on the point of writing to you. Come into my private office; we have much to say to each other.”

He turns to the office-boy and says peremptorily :

“Ganivet, if anybody asks for me I am not in. Tell Baptiste to lay an additional cover; my nephew will breakfast with me.”

While giving these directions he pushes me before him into his office, a high-ceiled apart-

ment, its walls covered with a fuzzy green paper, furnished with a great desk in ebony, a bookcase and luxurious easy-chairs covered with antique tapestry. On the wall I behold a reproduction of the red sign that greeted my eyes at the door downstairs, and beyond a map representing a mountainous region with shores bathed by an azure sea fills an entire panel. On the mantelshelf the ornamental clock is flanked on each side by velvet mats on which rest queer-looking bronze objects, eaten by verdigris and incrustated with sea-shells.

“Well!” my uncle cries in a tone of triumph, throwing down upon the desk his fine Russia leather portfolio, “well, Jacques! I have struck the vein at last and our fortune’s made. You will be none the worse for it, my boy, and I am going to remove you at once from the institute, where you are only taught theoretical knowledge, and launch you on the sea of practical life.”

“That happens very opportunely, uncle,” I sorrowfully reply, “for the institute closed its doors this morning and we were all sent home to our families.”

“You don’t tell me so!”

I proceed to relate the story of Cornevin’s downfall, and describe the lamentable scene of the seizure, but he scarcely listens to me.

“Ah, indeed,” he murmurs, absently; “poor Cornevin! Such is life, Jacques—a perpetual revolution of the wheel of Fortune; a furious conflict, where the weak go to the wall, where the strong come out victorious.—But let us speak

of more important matters. Reckoning from to-day you are in my employ as secretary; your salary will be one hundred and fifty francs a month, with board and lodging added."

I am not a little shocked by the philosophic indifference with which Scipio Mouginot receives the tidings of his good friend Cornevin's disaster, but I consider it the part of prudence to keep my reflections to myself, and merely ask in what my secretarial functions will consist.

"You will open my mail," he replies, "and write letters from my dictation. That will serve to give you an insight into the business, and you will be gradually acquainting yourself with the mechanism of the great Castro Galleons Salvage Company."

First and foremost I beg Scipio Mouginot to tell me what the galleons are.

"What!" he exclaims, "is it possible you have never heard tell of the famous galleons of Castro? But after all the great majority of people are in the same boat, and it is even to the universal prevalence of that dense ignorance that I am indebted for the success of my idea. Listen, then, my boy, for it is a wondrous story, as interesting as a fairy tale. You must know, in the first place, that these galleons were vessels fitted out by the kings of Spain and dispatched to America and the Antilles to collect the immense wealth that the discovery of the New World had placed at the disposal of the Spaniards. The galleons, the number of which was twelve, in honor of the twelve apostles,

used to bring over to Seville and Cadiz the royal treasure in ingots and coined money ; in this way each of these vessels would annually bring to Europe the value of ten or twelve millions in specie. Now it so fell out that in 1707, in the Bay of Castro, the combined English and Dutch fleets encountered the Spanish fleet, which was conveying a number of vessels with cargoes of gold and gems ; a sanguinary combat followed, which resulted in the destruction of the Spanish warships. In an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, the galleons, with their freight of ingots, precious stones, piastres and doubloons, were sunk in the waters of the bay, which at that point is nearly two leagues deep, and there they have remained ever since. It was about a month ago, in one of my hours of idleness, that my attention was attracted to this very thrilling narrative—and right here, Jacques, I want you to note the difference there is between one of your common, plodding intellects and a far-reaching mind that grasps great ideas and makes them its own by intuition, as it were ! Others before me had read the story of the naval conflict off Castro and seen nothing particularly noteworthy in it ; but your old uncle has the genuine commercial instinct which is never at fault. A luminous idea suddenly flashed across my mind, and like Archimedes I cried : ‘Eureka !’ I had, in very truth, struck a vein of marvelous richness, a veritable gold mine. For mark this, my boy : in the eighteenth century our knowledge of marine mechanics was in its infancy

and no one for an instant dreamed of such a thing as divers going down two leagues below the surface to wrest a fortune from the embrace of Ocean, but to-day the case is entirely different; our improved submarine armor permits man to explore at leisure the depths at the bottom of the sea. I communicated my idea to some bold capitalists, they grasped it, and our company was formed. What preliminary explorations we have made so far have been successful and assure us that the galleons are still slumbering at the bottom of the bay. There they are!" Scipio exultingly continues, leading me forward to the map and pointing to five or six small red crosses marked on the blue expanse of the sea. "Intrepid men have gone down into the deepest depths of the Bay of Castro, they have seen the galleons, Jacques, they have touched them with their hand! and the evidence they have brought back of their existence is irrefutable—"

"They brought back ingots of pure gold!" I cannot help exclaiming, my eyes distended to the size of saucers.

"No, not exactly," replies my uncle, "but they brought back these cannon-balls incrustated with shells. Look here, my lad," he adds, taking from the mantelshelf one of the strange-looking bronze objects that lie there on their velvet mats, "this bit of metal was taken from the hull of one of the vessels that lie sunken in the bay, and if a human hand could tear it from its resting-place, other determined hands will not be wanting to ravish from the waves

the untold wealth that has lain buried there for more than a hundred and fifty years. Reflect a moment on that mass of gold and precious substances ! There were twelve galleons, each with a freight on board valued at twelve millions ; that makes, at a low estimate, one hundred and forty-four millions that will all go into the pockets of our shareholders.”

While Uncle Scipio is speaking thus his eyes glitter with a strange, golden light, his hands tremble and make involuntary movements, as if scooping up great heaps of piastres and doubloons, and I, also, unable to resist the fascination of this extraordinary man, it seems to me that I can hear the pleasant chink of gold and silver ringing in my ears. I am dazzled, magnetized, and eye him with something approaching veneration while he continues :

“Of course the working expenses will amount to a round sum, but for all that we shall be safe in putting the net profits down at a hundred millions. We shall explain all this to the public through the medium of the newspapers, and the public, which can see through a millstone as readily as any private individual when there is a prospect of making money, the public, I say, will comprehend. It won't be long before capital will be flowing in on us ; our shares will command a premium on the Exchange, and then you and I will start together for the Bay of Castro to be present at the exhumation of those treasures that for more than a century and a half have been withdrawn from the world's circulation. And in the meantime,

Jacques, we'll go to breakfast; it is noon and Baptiste must be getting impatient."

He rises in his quick, impulsive way, and I follow him to the dining-room, which adjoins the office.

In the middle of this apartment, which has for its decorations various objects in brass and bronze and ancient pottery, whose bright colors are relieved against a dark wall-paper representing Flemish forest scenes, two covers are laid on a long, wide table about which Baptiste, in a red and white striped waistcoat, is hovering with a busy air. This Baptiste, who is a little older than I, and whose cunning, wide-awake phiz is not entirely unknown to me, cannot refrain from giving a grin of surprise on seeing me enter the room arm-in-arm with my uncle. As for me, the more I look at him the more assured I feel that I have fallen in with an old acquaintance. There comes a moment when the light from the window falls full on the man's face. I hesitate no longer, and looking him full in the eye, exclaim :

"Guigne-a-Gouche !"

"What, you here, Jacques !" rejoins my quondam comrade as he hands me the hors-d'œuvres. "What a jolly lark !"

"What's that ?" my uncle sharply interjects with a frown.

Baptiste vanishes silently to go to the kitchen for another dish, and while he is gone I inform Scipio Mouginot that his valet is none other than one of my old schoolmates at Pestel's establish-

ment. The manager of the Castro Galleons Salvage Company does not seem to be overjoyed by the coincidence.

“The dog never told me he was from Villotte,” he growls, “but the fact of his being a countryman of yours is no excuse for being disrespectfully familiar. Remember that you are my secretary and that it won’t answer to put yourself on a level with common trash.”

And when Guigne-a-Gouche reappears, bringing in a fillet Chateaubriand with fried potatoes, Scipio Mouginot turns to him with an air of great majesty and says in cutting tones :

“Baptiste, you are in my service, and I have promised, if you are faithful, to present you with a share of the company’s stock. I am informed that in childhood you had some acquaintance with M. Jacques Mouginot, now present in this room, but that is no reason why you should be wanting in the deference that is due from you to my nephew and my secretary. Bear this in mind ; if you fail to treat him with proper respect, the very first time I hear of it I will give you your week’s notice and you will lose your share in the profits of the company. Now fill our glasses for us.”

Guigne-a-Gouche bows with feigned humility and hastens to comply with the injunction of my uncle. When he is changing my plate or handing me a dish he is careful always to address me in the third person, but when he says : “Will monsieur have another slice of the fillet ?” or “Will monsieur take Bordeaux or Burgundy ?” he manages to infuse into his tone such

an expression of impudent hauteur that I am tempted to box his ears.

The manager of the Salvage Company lives well : there are scrambled eggs with truffles, a terrine of potted game, chicken livers *en brochette*, with white Bordeaux and red Burgundy to wash these good things down. The bill of fare seems to me none the less exquisite and bounteous that during the past week I have been condemned to a regimen of Italian cheese and codfish *a la bechamelle*. Scipio Mouginot, who has always had a weakness for good living, lingers lovingly over each dish and never ceases to make play with his knife and fork except to give me some fresh bit of information about his stupendous enterprise. What surprises me is that he has not opened his mouth to give me news of Mme. Clemence and Alice ; at dessert, accordingly, when Baptiste Guigne-a-Gouche is no longer in the room, I take advantage of his absence to lead the conversation around to the subject of the Saintot ladies.

“How are Mme. Clemence and Alice, uncle?”

“Oh, they are very well,” he replies as he peels his peach.

“Do they live near here?”

“They live upstairs in the hotel, on the second floor, and you will have an opportunity to see them this evening. I will send Baptiste up to ask them to dine with us.”

“If you don’t object I will go myself and give them your invitation.”

“It would be useless ; you would not find

them at home. They are both out, attending to the duties of their occupation."

I look at my uncle with amazement. Can it be that those ladies are obliged to go out to earn their living? How is it that Scipio Mouginot, who benefited in days of yore by the Vosges linen business, has not made his former partners sharers in his present prosperity? He reads my astonishment on my mobile face and goes on to say :

"Mme. Saintot, Jacques, is a fair specimen of feminine obstinacy and pusillanimity. You saw with what superhuman courage and resignation she struggled against adversity in our evil days; well, you would hardly believe it, but soon as Fortune began to smile on us she showed the white feather. That's the way with all women, my dear boy; they are very brave as long as they can feel the solid ground under their feet, but incapable of spreading their wings and soaring in grander, more majestic flight. They are deficient in daring and wing-power. Think of it once, Mme. Clemence has doubts about the future of the company! As a matter of course, my very first thought was to do something in acknowledgment of the support and assistance rendered me by that valiant woman. I gave her ten shares of Salvage Company stock, which, issued at a nominal par of two thousand francs, will appreciate in value threefold soon as it is listed on the Bourse, thus giving her a nice little capital of sixty thousand francs. But the blindness of my poor friend is unfortunately so great that when she had set-

tled up the affairs of her little business I could not persuade her to listen to my advice. She insisted on taking a cashier's place in the dress-making establishment where she had put her daughter as apprentice. The utmost I could prevail on Mme. Clemence to do was to accept an apartment in my house. The shop closes at seven o'clock, and the ladies will be here by eight. Our dinner will be delayed somewhat, but we can afford to put up with that inconvenience for their sake."

Promptly at eight o'clock, as if to sustain my uncle's reputation for veracity, the ladies make their appearance and are received in the director's room by Scipio with the warmest demonstrations of affection. Mme. Clemence still wears the same grave, sweet face, illuminated from time to time by a sad smile. As for Alice, although she is barely fifteen, she is a veritable little woman in manner and appearance. She is much taller; she has put on long dresses, which make her fragile form look still more slender. With her white, virginal face, she reminds one somehow of a lily, swaying to the wind at the end of its long, flexile stem. Her hair no longer falls in waves upon her shoulders; she wears it arranged in a modest chignon that covers the back of the neck and in smooth bandeaux over the temples, which adds to the lofty expression of her features a purity almost mystical. It seems to me that the confinement of the room where she works all day long cannot be very good for her; she is certainly much thinner than she used to be, and

her great brown eyes have a strange brilliancy which makes them appear larger than they are, while under the lower lids are tell-tale purplish circles, and her contralto voice sounds hoarsely, as if there were in the young girl's throat some obstinate affection impairing the flexibility of the vocal cords.

Mme. Clemence receives me with her usual kindness; Alice's welcome is colder and more reserved. Her manner has in it something of indifference, of impassiveness, that I have never noticed there before. She maintains a sort of maidenly reclusion, as if she would check every attempt at familiarity and say to those who come near her: "Touch me not." She seems to be trying to build up a wall about her personality, and to dread being brought in contact with the thoughts and personality of others. Speak to her and she listens, but she has the air of being a hundred leagues away. It is quite true that since the failure of my declaration in verse I have not flattered myself with hopes of gaining Alice's affection, but I love her still, and feel the sting of jealousy in witnessing her coldness; I argue to myself that if she does not think of me it is probably because she thinks too much of some one else.

These jealous imaginings dash the pleasure I should otherwise receive from the prodigious success of my uncle's undertaking. Gladly would I give all the doubloons and piastres in the galleons, were they mine to give, if by so doing I might recover the little Alice of by-gone days. These considerations, however, do

not prevent me from devoting myself heart and soul to my new duties, which, by the way, are neither very laborious nor very confining. When I have opened my uncle's mail I sit down at his desk and write out from his dictation advertisements that are to see the light in the columns of the newspapers and circulars which we send off to men of mark in Paris and the provinces, whose names we discover by hunting through Bottin's Directory. Scipio Mouginot does not overlook the good folks of Villotte; he could not endure that the city of his birth should not be acquainted with the opulence and brilliancy of promise that reside in the newly discovered "vein." He not only bombards the Mouginot-Pechoins and the Mouginot-Tupins with prospectuses, but he even sends them to Cousin Delorme. As I inclose the circular intended for the paper mill I cannot help thinking how ungrateful I have proved toward my kind friends at Jeand'heurs, to whom I have not written in upward of a year, and I breathe a remorseful sigh into the Delorme's envelope as I close the flap. I think of them one whole day, but the night brings Alice back once more to the Rue de Conde, and then my thoughts are all of her. All my evenings, or nearly all, are spent in company with the Saintot ladies, while my uncle is running here and there to keep his business appointments. As a result of my assiduity and close friendship with Mme. Clemence I ascertain that my jealousy is groundless and that I have no other rival in Alice's heart than God. My little

friend is of late become very pious. She has ceased to care for the theater and refuses to accept the box that Scipio Mouginot occasionally offers us; she never opens a novel now, and her habitual reading is the "Lives of the Saints" and the "Imitatio." In her moments of religious exaltation she seems no longer to have eyes for the things of this world; her feet are lifted off the earth, and she appears as if about to wing her flight aloft to join the Dominations and the Seraphim. It is this intensity of devotion that gives her an appearance of indifference and reserve; this it is that gives her that beauty, mystical as a white blossom's, which, while doubling my admiration, fills my heart with sadness.

Six months speed by without bringing any change in our situation worthy to be mentioned. From time to time my uncle has the pleasure of adding a new name to his list of shareholders, but at no time does the window labeled "transfers" witness a crowd in front of it fighting to obtain possession of our shares. The requisite preliminary work is going on at the Bay of Castro; the divers have again explored the bottom of the Atlantic, and this time have feasted their eyes on the treasures of the galleons; all that is now left to do is to construct machinery of sufficient power to pump out the submerged hulls, and then bring to land the wealth that has so long lain buried in the depths of the ocean. At least that is what we keep repeating in the articles that the newspapers publish in their columns and for

which we pay them a great deal of our spare cash. My uncle composes these articles in the persuasive and picturesque style that he excels in, and—strange to relate—when he runs his eye over his lucubrations, fresh from the printing press, is the first one to be taken in by them and imagines that everything has happened just as stated.

“You see how it is, Jacques,” he says, throwing down the newspaper from which he has been magniloquently declaiming, “the truth is beginning to come out, people are commencing to give me the credit I am entitled to and the Press is taking up the subject of the galleons. Things are moving! things are moving!”

Our time is spent in poring over the public journals and discussing their contents. Gani-vet, the office-boy, devotes himself more assiduously than ever to the *Petit Journal*. Guigne-a-Gouche, otherwise known as Baptiste, scarcely removes his eyes from the printed list of stock quotations; he carries it about with him in his pocket and consults it when he should be dusting the furniture. As he is of an extremely practical turn of mind, however, and does not believe in wind as a medium of exchange, he fumes and frets, shakes his head disapprovingly, and when he catches me alone in the director’s room makes no bones of “giving me a piece of his mind.”

“Oh, come now, Jacques,” he grumbles, “ain’t they listed yet, those famous shares of yours? Your uncle promised to give me a part interest for my wages, but it won’t

do for him to bamboozle me too long, because I will give him as good as he sends, I will ! I ain't the sort to be gammoned, I ain't !”

Scipio Mouginot's voice is suddenly heard outside in the antechamber ; then Guigne-a-Gouche, resuming his usual sanctimonious air, inquires in a whining voice :

“ Did you ring, Monsieur Jacques ? ”

It would not take much to induce me to give him a good kicking.

At last one evening, while Mme. Clemence, Alice and I are together upstairs in the hotel, and about to take a cup of tea, the door flies open with a bang and we behold before us Scipio Mouginot, bareheaded, hair flying in the wind, eyes sparkling, a smile of triumph on his lips.

“ My friends,” he shouts, waving a newspaper above his head, “ my children, victory, victory ! They are listed ! ”

With a magnificent movement he holds out to us the official list of the Bourse, and pointing to a line in the column headed *Sales for the Account*, reads it to us as if it were a proclamation :

“ ‘ Galleons of Castro, 2001 francs.’ They are listed, and up a franc already ! Let us embrace all around ! Baptiste, bring up some champagne ! ”

We all join in a general embrace. Alice herself, notwithstanding her religious inclinations, shares in our profane rejoicing. Scipio, his paper in his hand, dances about the room like a child ; Mme. Clemence sheds tears of joy ; I profit by the occasion to surreptitiously hug my

little friend, and for a few fleeting moments perfect happiness reigns in the old house of the Rue de Conde.

CHAPTER XIII.

RATHER more than a month has passed since our shares were listed, and within that brief period our enthusiasm has received a set-back. The advance of a franc that filled Scipio Mouginot with such pride and happiness did not hold; the price gave way and in less than a week the stock tumbled from two thousand to one thousand eight hundred francs. But my uncle's confidence did not decline with the price of the shares.

While we are engaged in the silent inner office one afternoon, he and I, in framing a new advertisement intended to arouse the slumbering interest of the public, Ganivet softly opens the door and presents to Scipio a card on a metal salver. He says that the owner of the card would like to know if M. the manager can see him.

"Of course, of course," replies my uncle; "show him in."

Ganivet retires and presently returns escorting two visitors, in whom I recognize M. Delorme and Zelig. An exclamation of surprise and delight escapes me; I hug my good cousin and give Zelig a kiss, and Scipio Mouginot, for his part, assumes his most gracious air and extends his hands to the newcomers.

"Delighted to see you, my dear compatri-

ots!" he exclaims, "most happy to have it in my power to thank you for all your kindness to my nephew Jacques! What good wind brings you to Paris?"

"*Mon Dieu*, the matter is simple enough," replies Cousin Delorme; "I have always promised Zélie that when she was fifteen I would give her a glimpse of Paris; I had business in the capital, and took advantage of the circumstance to bring my little girl along with me."

They have taken their seats, and my eyes dwell with pleasure on the good, honest folks from Jeand'heurs, who seem to have brought into the room with them a whiff of the air and savor of my birthplace. Everything about them exhales an undisguised odor of the fields: their honest, candid faces, their bronzed complexions, their somewhat rustic manners, even their serviceable Sunday suits, so evidently of home manufacture. Zélie has grown; she is now a buxom, well-developed girl and looks older even than she is. It cannot be said that she is pretty—her irregular features are too prominent, her cheeks are brown as a berry where the sun has kissed them, her chestnut hair is unbecomingly arranged—but for all a village seamstress has made her gown, she has a nice figure, her eyes are limpid as a crystal spring, her teeth are dazzlingly white. Taken altogether she gives one an impression of something wholesome, intelligent and strong. Looking at her, one feels somewhat as he does when contemplating a field of wheat lying in the golden sunshine, where blue corn-flowers and

scarlet poppies add touches of vivid color and whence rises a salubrious odor of ripe grain.

"You did well to bring this charming young lady to Paris," Uncle Scipio goes on, bestowing on Zelig one of his most seductive smiles. "I suppose she is fond of sight-seeing, and I hope I may be able to be of service to her in that respect. I occasionally have a box at my disposal at the principal theaters, and I shall be pleased if you will avail yourselves of it."

"Faith, I'm not the man to say you nay," replies Cousin Delorme with cheerful frankness, "for theater tickets here come high, and as for your money, presto! it vanishes almost before you can get your porte-monnaie out of your pocket."

"Yes, we spend a great deal of money here at Paris, but then on the other hand we work hard and make a great deal. That is just what I and my nephew are doing now," adds my uncle, who never lets slip an opportunity of puffing his great scheme. "No doubt you have heard of the galleons of Castro?"

"I read the prospectus that you were so obliging as to send me."

"Well, you are a man competent to judge; what do you think of it? A promising venture and a glorious enterprise, is it not? Our shares are a safe investment, the security is absolute, and they will ultimately pay splendid dividends."

"That is very possible," cautiously observes M. Delorme, "provided you first succeed in finding the Spanish doubloons at the bottom of

the sea and then are able to bring them safe to land, but your expenses in accomplishing that will be enormous, while the profits, for the present, at least, are purely speculation."

"Your remarks are not devoid of justice," my uncle rejoins, "but we are in a position to refute them. I will pledge myself in less than an hour's time to go to the very root of the question with you and convince you of the practicability of the enterprise. My time is not my own to-day, unfortunately; but come and dine with us some day and we will talk the matter over at our leisure. We have a friend here in the house—a lady—whose daughter is of the same age as yours and who will be happy to be of service to Miss Zelig. Let's see, now; day after to-morrow will be Sunday. Will you come to us that afternoon? We will have a plain family dinner and take the children to the show afterward."

M. Delorme gives his assent, and it is agreed that we are to meet again on the coming Sunday. I accompany my friends from Jeand'heurs to the foot of the stairs, where Zelig and I exchange a few words together, the cousin having gone on ahead.

"I am glad to have seen you again," says she; "you have blossomed out into a regular Parisian. Do you like the life here?"

"Why, yes, my dear cousin, and you would like it, too, I am certain."

"I don't think it. The noise deafens me, my head whirls whenever I go out upon the street, and I am homesick already."

“That’s the way everybody feels for the first few days, but you will change your mind on Sunday when we go to the theater, and then you will have a chance to see how pretty Alice is.”

“Alice?” — oh, yes, I remember; your little queen of the woods down there at Villotte,” she replies, and her blue eyes give me a melancholy look. “I have a feeling that she won’t like me, but for all that I shall be glad to make her acquaintance. Till Sunday, Jacques!”

“Till Sunday, Zélie!”

Cousin Delorme has halted at the entrance, where he is running his eye over the great red sign. While thus occupied the expression of his face appears to be one of contempt rather than of enthusiastic conviction. When he has reached the end of his reading he lays his hand affectionately on my shoulder and says:

“Are you also a believer in the galleons?”

“Why, of course I am, Cousin Delorme.”

“Well, well, my lad, so much the better!” he exclaims in a tone of pitying irony; “it is a good thing to have faith —”

We shake hands, and I follow father and daughter with wistful glances for yet a little while as they vanish in the direction of the Carrefour de l’Odeon.

The old house in the Rue de Conde sees them within its walls again on the Sunday afternoon, according to promise. M. Delorme’s air and manner lead me to believe that he is already tired of leading an idle and nomadic life; he is suffering from lack of occupation, from the nos-

talgia that Paris inevitably induces in its country visitors. The ceaseless stir and bustle of his hotel destroy his sleep, the fare of the restaurant deranges his stomach, the uproar of the unfeeling, indifferent crowd saddens and wearies him. Even Zelig seems to have lost her accustomed liveliness and good-humor; she is shy and ill at ease; one would say she was ashamed of the countrified appearance she makes in her ill-fitting dress and hat bedecked with gaudy flowers. More than likely she has been looking in the windows of the great dry-goods shops and examining the *toilettes* of the fine ladies she has met, whence her feminine instincts have told her she was a fright and her womanly vanity has suffered accordingly. It is a fact that when the Saintot ladies come down to dinner and I behold Alice and my cousin side by side, I cannot help making comparisons which are not favorable to the latter. The simplicity, harmony and good taste that characterize Mlle. Saintot's appearance are in striking contrast with the old-fashioned and inelegant attire of the little country girl, with the loud and ill-sorted colors of her costume. Seen beside Alice's interesting pallor and refined features, Zelig's sunburnt face and ruggedly healthy form have something coarse and vulgar in them. I have this difference staring me in the face all through dinner, and am affected disagreeably by it. My cousin probably reads my thoughts in my face, for she becomes more and more shy and silent; she scarcely responds to Alice's advances and gives no attention at all to the eloquent dis-

course that Scipio Mouginot addresses to M. Delorme to convince him of the exceptional benefits that must accrue to those who invest their money in Castro Salvage shares,

On rising from table we leave the house for the theater. My uncle, who has it at heart to impress his friends from the country with an idea of his magnificence, has secured places at the opera, where they are to play "The Huguenots." As Mme. Clemence has declined to be of the company, there are five of us in the second tier box, the two young ladies in front and we masculines in the semi-darkness of the rear. Cousin Delorme, who is uncomfortably warm and can make nothing of the libretto, falls asleep on his chair at the beginning of the second act. Zelig, too, notwithstanding Alice's laconic explanations, does not appear greatly interested in the piece; the lights hurt her eyes, the orchestra deafens her with its din, and then she would seem to have some secret trouble of her own of too absorbing a nature to let her sympathize with the woes of luckless Raoul and Valentine. M. Delorme awakes with a start at the discharge of musketry in the last act and the screams of the Huguenots who are being murdered in the church. We leave the building, and once out on the boulevard hail a cab for Zelig and her father, to whom I promise a visit early in the morning.

Among the first things I do on the following day, consequently, is to run off to the Rue Coquilliere to hunt up the Delormes at their hotel. Almost the first person I set eyes on upon

entering the office is my cousin, in deep conference with the female manager.

“Good-morning, Jacques,” says he, “I am just settling my bill—I have seen all I want to see of Paris, and we’re off by the midday train. Do you go up to No. 45, though ; you’ll find Zélie there. I will be with you in a few minutes.”

I climb the stairs, I succeed in finding No. 45 at the bottom of a long passageway, and Zélie in person opens the door in response to my knock. She has her traveling dress on and is in process of strapping the trunk that serves in common her and her father. Her blue eyes are illumined by a fugitive light on seeing me, which is quenched almost instantly by a gathering moisture, suspiciously like tears.

“What an early bird you are, cousin !” I say to her as I take her hand. “Don’t you feel tired after being out so late ? I am afraid you did not find ‘The Huguenots’ very amusing.”

“To tell the truth, I did not understand it very well,” she replies ; “it is too deep for me. There can be no doubt of it, I am too thick-headed to enjoy life at Paris.”

“So you are going to leave us ?”

“Yes ; I would have liked well enough to remain a few days longer, for I have hardly had a chance to speak to you. But in the first place you are very busy, and then I can see that papa wants to get home, and it is my duty not to oppose him.”

She turns away her head and bends over the trunk again. There is silence between us for a moment, which I am the first to break :

“Well, you have seen Alice. What do you think of her?”

“She is very pretty,” she briefly answers. “You have not overpraised her.”

She sighs, kneels before the trunk, and finishes strapping it.

“Don’t you think she has a Madonna face?”

“I do not know just what Madonna’s may be like,” my cousin returns in a rather pettish tone, “but there is certainly something strange in her appearance. After all, though, that doubtless arises from her state of health.”

“Her state of health?” I exclaim. “Do you think that—?”

“I think she is not very strong,” Zelig replies, “and has something the matter with her chest.”

Cousin Delorme’s entrance interrupts the conversation; he is crumpling the hotel bill nervously between his fingers.

“Your Parisian innkeepers,” he cries, “are even greater robbers than ours! Six francs a day for two little rooms where we couldn’t get a wink of sleep—it is abominable! It will be a frigid day when you catch me here again. We shall sleep at Jeand’heurs to-night, though, and I for one shall not be sorry. Come now, Jacques, tell the truth, aren’t you tired of this life, and don’t your heart tell you to quit it and return with us? There is always a room for you at the paper mill, you know.”

“Thank you, Cousin Delorme, but you must remember that I am my uncle’s secretary. And really I cannot bring myself to abandon a career that affords such brilliant promise.”

“Oh, of course,” he replies, ironically; “I had forgot that you have galleons on the brain. And you, too, have hopes of clearing your little million out of this company which is founded on nothing more substantial than sea fog! My poor boy, you have got to learn that all that glitters is not gold; your hopes will vanish in smoke.”

“You cannot deny that the company exists, however. It has splendid quarters, capital, a board of directors—”

“Yes, yes; plenty of bluff, and nothing behind. When the cash receipts are all spent the board of directors will make the stockholders a polite bow and tell them to go whistle, and then your uncle will find things growing very warm for him. I know how it is with these grand money-making schemes of Scipio’s; they burst some fine morning and vanish like a soap-bubble. I was in your office only a short time, and it seemed to me I could detect an odor of corruption there. Well, when the collapse comes don’t forget that you have friends and well-wishers at Jeand’heurs. And now we’ll say good-by, for it is getting on near train time.”

I am provoked with my cousin for his hostility toward the Salvage Company, but embrace him nevertheless, then turn to Zelig. Her face is very pale and her emotion such that she can hardly part her lips to speak. She holds up her cheek for me to kiss without saying a word, and our leave-taking is a sorrowful one.

I return to the Rue de Conde bearing with

me a vague, deep-seated sensation of uneasiness. Zelig's parting words touching Alice's health distress me and impart somber hues to all surrounding objects. When at evening once again I am in company with my little friend I watch her furtively, and it seems to me that the fears expressed by my cousin are only too well founded. Alice is grown very thin; her frequent fits of coughing frighten me. Mme. Clemence, too, appears to be anxious over the changed condition of her daughter's health. She says nothing to the young girl of what is on her mind, doubtless from fear of causing her alarm; but she displays increased solicitude, she obliges Alice to go more warmly clad, she makes her take tonics, alleging various pretexts. The girl submits to the new regimen with the same careless indifference that she now displays for everything. Her religious exaltation is even yet more marked, and the things of earth have less and less attraction for her.

While we have these cares to trouble us the months are gliding slowly by. The affairs of the company languish; no one visits the office now to exchange his cash for our shares. The cashier's time is more occupied with paying bills than with depositing our receipts in bank. Each day the quotations of the Bourse have a fresh disappointment in store for us. Galleons have fallen to five hundred francs, and my uncle, who is become taciturn and morose, has not a word more to say of the great works that are being conducted out at the Bay of

Castro. The situation of Ganivet, our office-boy, is almost a sinecure; he has abundance of time to read, not the *Petit Journal* alone, but heaps of greasy, dog's-eared novels, with which his desk is constantly loaded.

As for Baptiste Guigne-a-Gouche, his anger knows no bounds, and it is I whom he selects as the object on which to discharge the vials of his wrath. Each time that he catches me alone, out of sight and hearing of my uncle, he gets me in a corner against the wall and, unmindful of my secretarial dignity, proceeds to free his mind in a tone of mingled injury and irritation.

“Look here, now,” he says, “does your uncle take me for a natural born fool? It is a perfect shame the way the shares keep going down! And here am I who haven't received the first penny of my wages! If that's the game you're up to I'll make a fuss; you see if I don't—and I won't wait a great while longer, either!”

I might tell him that I am in the same boat and have never been recompensed for my services as secretary, but feel that not only would such an avowal fail to pacify him, but would have indeed a directly opposite effect. I do what I can to bring healing to his wounded susceptibilities by promising to refresh my uncle's memory, and he takes himself off, brandishing his feather duster in a way that bodes no good. The comrade is fond of money, his patience is not of the angelic order, and I

have a prevision that some fine day he will explode, like a boiler run at too high a pressure.

Coming in from an errand one morning I hear loud voices raised in anger in the manager's office. I hurry my steps, and entering the room behold my uncle in the act of shaking Guigne-a-Gouche as if he were a plum tree. Scipio Mouginot is superb in his indignant wrath; his eyes emit fulgurous flashes and his words have the ring of a trumpet blast.

"You impudent rascal!" he roared at the cowed waiting-man, "you thankless serpent whom I have warmed in my bosom, leave the house; I discharge you!"

Guigne-a-Gouche goes, and stands not on the order of his going, but once outside raises a most tremendous racket, bringing the other tenants out upon the stairs and vociferating that he will call in the police.

This scandal is the epoch marking the commencement of our downfall. There is no denying it: the affairs of the Salvage Company are in very, very bad shape. The gentlemen with rosettes on their coats are no longer to be seen in the board-room, the offices are silent and deserted, and when I open the morning mail all that I find there is tradesmen's bills and papers bearing the stamp of government, all which I faithfully turn over to Uncle Scipio.

He gives them a brief glance with his practiced eye and negligently throws them into a great Japanese vase that stands beside his desk. But he cannot deal with his creditors as he deals with bills and drafts. It is a frequent

occurrence now to hear stormy colloquies in the antechamber which remind me of the Cornevin Institute as it was in the last days of my residence there. Sometimes, indeed, notwithstanding the opposition of the faithful Ganivet, who is adamant itself in firmness, a creditor, more stubborn or with broader shoulders than the rest, forces himself in and falls like a bombshell into the manager's office. These are the occasions when it is granted me to appreciate at their true value the resources of Scipio's genius and his unequaled powers of persuasion. Not only does he manage to send away the unpaid shopkeeper in a happy frame of mind, but many a time he succeeds in winning him over by dangling before his eyes the golden bait of the galleons and induces him to become a stockholder.

All said and done, however, there is too much in our circumstances that reminds one of a house where there has been a recent death. That we are hard-pressed is only too plainly evident. The magnificent Jurgensen that my uncle used to extract so ostentatiously from his waistcoat pocket is seen no more, and other valuable knick-knacks that formerly served to ornament the apartment have gone the way of the watch. It is Ganivet who carries them away in secrecy and silence, under the mysterious cloak of darkness. I am unable to say whether the fact that there is a branch of the Mont de Piete in our neighborhood had anything to do with influencing my perspicacious uncle's choice when he hired the house in the Rue de Conde, but at all events the presence

of the pawnbroker seems providential and our office-boy makes frequent journeys to his shop, which is situated a little way up the street. I notice, moreover, that he does not confine himself to carrying off the trinkets and *bibelots* which are my uncle's own personal property, but that he is charged by Mme. Clemence with a similar mission with reference to certain goods and chattels of hers. I cannot help but be worried and alarmed by all these symptoms of approaching disaster. They would disquiet me even more had I not matters still more serious to distress me.

Alice is far from well. Several times she has been compelled to abandon her work where she is employed and keep her room. She has no appetite, coughs incessantly, and a doctor whom I have brought in at Mme. Clemence's request shakes his head significantly after testing my little friend's lungs by auscultation. He says it is an obstinate case of laryngitis, and recommends a sojourn at the South during the trying months of winter.

The South! Assuredly pure air and sunshine would be potent remedies for the child, who has been breathing for so long a time the foul atmosphere of the workroom; but how is such a journey possible in our present critical circumstances? Mme. Saintot cannot give up her cashier's place, which is now her sole source of livelihood, and as for Scipio Mouginot, he is so utterly discouraged and prostrated by the failure of his great project that it is useless to look to him for aid. And then,

too, he appears to have no idea that Alice is ailing; for the last month he has not shown his face in the apartment on the second floor more than two or three times. . Ah! how devoutly I wish it were in my power at this distressing juncture to come to the succor of the dear child! If I but had an occupation, if I could earn the money necessary for the journey!—but useless lamentations are all I have to give. Mme. Clemence, moved by a heroic sentiment of delicacy, has forbidden me to speak of the matter to Uncle Scipio.

“He has trials enough of his own,” she says, “without tormenting him with the troubles of others.”

It seems to me that this is carrying self-abnegation too far, and after revolving the subject in my mind I resolve to see what I can effect with my uncle. His heart is good and his imagination fertile; may it not be that he will evolve some plan for saving Alice? It is on a gloomy afternoon in October, when the rain has confined us both indoors, that I make up my mind to impart to him my apprehensions. I push the door open softly and enter the office of the manager, where I find Scipio Mouginot sunk listlessly in his fauteuil, his face shaded by his hand, the picture of desolation.

“Is it you, Jacques?” he murmurs, removing his hand and disclosing a woebegone countenance. “A gloomy day, my boy, a gloomy day, outside as well as in! Our affairs are like the weather—there is little cheer in them. The

glorious enterprise of the galleons is foundering, sinking, beneath the weight of some men's hostility and the blundering stupidity of others. I have been forced to yield my assent to the dissolution of the company ; a receiver has been appointed, and after to-morrow I shall be nothing here. I shall make my exit as I made my entrance—poor, but without a smirch upon my honor ! ”

I could not possibly have selected a more unpropitious moment for speaking to the luckless manager of Alice's condition, but I pluck up my courage, and expressing to my uncle my profound commiseration for him in his time of trouble, I add :

“ What is to become of Mme. Saintot—and Alice ? ”

“ Oh, Mme. Clemence is a valiant woman, nothing is capable of daunting her. Besides, she has her position as cashier.”

“ That is very little, particularly in her daughter's present state of health.”

“ Her daughter's health ! What's that you're telling me ? Is Alice ill ? ”

“ Have you not noticed how she has changed of late ? She coughs continually, her strength is giving way. We have had a doctor in ; he tells me that the lungs are affected and recommends a visit to Nice or Mentone.”

My uncle rouses himself from his abstraction and shakes his head :

“ This is the first I have heard of the matter—Alice consumptive, you say ! Poor child, poor child ! And the doctor prescribes a resi-

dence at the littoral—the country of sunshine and flowers? I, too, have always cherished a fond dream of knowing the benign land where the orange trees bloom!—but I have always had business, my eternal rock of Sisypheus, impending over me. Nice the beautiful, the Mediterranean, forever smiling, forever blue; what a vision!”

Scipio Mouginot's face has lost its woebegone expression, his eyes dance with their wonted smiling brilliancy. It would seem that the sun of the South, by some mysterious process of induction, has brought back his vanished youth and erased the wrinkles from his brow, the cares and troubles from his mind.

“Nice!” he continues; “I remember that there is a man down there who owes me money—a nurseryman, who bought a bill of Vosges linen from us, and from whom we were never able to extract a sou. Those Southerners have no idea of business. Just think, Jacques, he offered to pay me in kind—in flowers and oranges!”

My uncle has risen from his chair. He walks with great strides up and down the room. Suddenly he stops, smites himself on the forehead, raises both arms high in air and cries:

“Oh, I have it!—I have an idea, a most pregnant idea!” And coming back and facing me with a triumphant air: “My boy, when the vein has ceased to yield, the man is an idiot who keeps on working it. A man of action should do as the soldier does when on the march—

when he finds his musket becoming heavy he shifts it to the other shoulder ; and that is what I am going to do instanter. The galleons are dead ; hurrah for the fruits and flowers of the Cornice ! The worthy horticulturist who owes me money has offered to pay me with his products. We must take the ball on the bound. With his assistance we may be able to build up an extensive business. The flower trade is daily assuming larger proportions. We'll start a great floricultural company ; we'll inundate Paris with roses and violets. Ha, ha, Jacques ! the idea has struck root, it puts forth buds of promise ; it shall bear fruits of gold, like those of the littoral ! Run quick to our dear child and tell her to pack her trunks ; before we are two days older we will bear her away to Nice ! ”

CHAPTER XIV.

UNCLE SCIPIO has proved himself a man of his word ; he, Alice and I are installed in lodgings at Nice. When we left Paris on a bitterly cold day in October the poor child was shivering and her teeth chattered in the railway car ; I feared she would not have strength to endure the fatigue of the long journey. By the time we reach Marseilles, however, the vivifying sun of Provence appears to have given renewed vigor to our patient, and when, coming to a bend in the road among the mountains of Esterel, we behold before us the gracious in-

dentations of the coast, the blue Mediterranean's broad expanse, the gentle hills with their terraced orange groves, the great fields of roses and tuberose, Alice's pale cheeks flush with delight and a bright smile plays on her lips. During the first week of our residence a sudden change for the better manifests itself; our little friend regains her old-time gayety, and we commence to entertain hopes that she will get well. This being the case, my uncle assumes to himself the airs and the credit of being her preserver; to hear him talk one would suppose that it was he, unaided, who had wrought this miracle, by devotedly expatriating himself in order that Alice might no longer breathe the impure air of Paris. But I am not so unsophisticated as I used to be; experience has made me something of a skeptic, and Scipio Mouginot is less a sealed book to me than he was. I have my suspicions that if he was so ready to take Alice on the Southern trip it was owing to his necessities rather than to his affection for the girl, and that his chief object was to put himself beyond the reach of his unfortunate creditors.

Now he is hot as fire in following up his new enterprise. Before leaving Paris he called on some money-lenders of his acquaintance and, by dint of his glowing accounts of the enormous profits to be realized, succeeded in raising a small capital, and immediately on his arrival he proceeds to hunt up his Nicois debtor. The honest horticulturist is financially embarrassed, and is delighted to liquidate his debt by dis-

pensing to my uncle the violets and oranges from his garden. Scipio has hired a spacious shop and four rooms on the floor above in the Rue Saint-Francois-de-Paule, only a step or two from the Cours. He has adorned the front with magnificent plate-glass windows of crystalline transparency, and above the door an attractive sign displays in great golden letters the legend :

GARDEN OF ARMIDA.

BOUQUETS FOR HIGH-LIFE A SPECIALTY.—FLOWERS FOR EXPORT.—ENGLISH SPOKEN.

And of a truth the shop does produce something of the effect of a garden of enchantment with its stuccoed walls and brightly transparent glass, its ornamented ceiling and odorous atmosphere. The floor, laid in black and white marble tiles, is kept strewn with a light coating of fine sand. On the tiers of shelves in the showcases cut flowers are arranged in handsome jars and vases of Vallauris; the marble counters are ablaze with brilliant color, subdued and softened by masses of tender verdure, and when a ray of sunshine enters through the window and falls upon the gracious, bright display, all those half-open calices, all those soft-hued petals, seem to palpitate and become instinct with life. Tea-roses exhibit their delicate shades of color against a background of maiden-hair and spleenwort, fragile and filmy as lace; blood-red carnations rear their heads above virginal, cream-white hyacinths; the brownish purple of Russian

violets and the azure of Parma violets harmonize deliciously with the bright yellow of mimosas, the lemon-color of jonquils and the vivid gold of chrysanthemums. On every side is a symphony of color, attended by a symphony of perfume. The vanilla of heliotropes mingles with the spicy fragrance of white julians, the faint, suave odor of mignonette is lost among the more powerful, heady exhalations of jasmine. And above these tremulous, verdant fronds and this opulence of bright-hued blossoms, these fair, frail structures fashioned like cups, like bells, or pendent in graceful clusters, above these banks of creamy white and brilliant scarlet, Alice, seated at the counter, rears her pretty head, flower among flowers, a budding rose among those roses blown.

Only a few steps from our shop is the market-place, which each morning affords a bright scene of cheerful gayety. The pleasant girls who have come in from the near-by villages with baskets filled with country produce station themselves in rows along the sidewalk up to our very door, and thus we have another spectacle on which to feast our eyes. The aromatic herbs interspersed among the homely but sweet-scented flowers of the garden, the great piles of vegetables, of lemons and oranges with their glossy dark-green leaves, the pyramids of purple figs, tell of a land of plenty where merely to draw the breath of life is a delight. Among these tempting displays of fruits and flowers, which exhale a wholesome odor of the country, a gayly dressed throng of

pleasure-seekers is constantly in motion, laughing, talking, and accosting one another. Gusts of merriment rise on the sun-warmed air, where they blend with the sonorous music of the provençal *patois*. We all lose our hearts and are captivated by the charm of our surroundings: by the expansive jollity of these good people of the South, the smiling blue sea that we catch glimpses of through the arched entrance-ways of the houses on the terrace, and the magical effects of the light falling with softened splendor of silver and azure on the rounded hills clad with dense groves of olive trees. Scipio Mouginot is gayer and jauntier than ever; with his ready faculty of assimilation he has put off the Parisian and become a Nicois in all his ways; he even speaks with a provençal accent. Alice once more thinks that it is good to live; she has laid aside that calm indifference for object animate and inanimate that formerly distressed me so; earth claims her for its own again, and only a day or two ago I overheard her humming an Italian air that an organ was playing down in the Rue Saint-Francois-de-Paule.

Attracted by my uncle's good-humored loquacity, and yet more by Alice's ethereal beauty, customers soon begin to flock to the Garden of Armida. The ladies of the English colony have taken a liking to the pretty flower-girl, whom they call "the little Madonna," and all the young swells of Nice consider it the correct thing to buy their button-hole bouquets from us; our shop has the approval of the world of

fashion. The bouquets, which Alice arranges with a taste that is altogether Parisian, have a character of originality and an expression, so to speak, of life ; we find ourselves unable to fill our orders and are obliged to employ extra help. My uncle rubs his hands and declares that our fortune is made, and with returning prosperity his love for good cheer and the comforts of life also returns. He deprives himself of no gratification ; our table is always abundantly supplied with all the delicacies the market has to afford. On Sundays a carriage is engaged at the livery stable and we all drive over to Beaulieu or Saint-Jean and have breakfast there ; now and then we even push on as far as Monaco and Mentone. It is late when we return ; the sky is spangled with stars, which, owing to the clearness of the atmosphere, appear double the size of those at home. Exhilarated by the beauty of the night, the perfume of woods and fields, and also, it may be, by a certain wine of Bellet with which he has irrigated his *bouilla baisse*, Scipio Mouginot swears that Nice is the finest city in the world, that opportunities of making money are as thick as lemons on the trees, and in a fine frenzy of enthusiasm he declares that we will never leave it until we are all millionaires.

I do not put much faith in his prophecies, however. With the experience of the past still fresh in my memory, I know now how prone my uncle is to deceive himself with glittering generalities and how unconcernedly he kills his goose that laid the golden egg after devoting

the most loving care to rearing it. I have an ill-defined idea that we are spending all we make, and I reflect with terror on what our destiny must be should the Garden of Armida some day experience the fate of the galleons of Castro. It is Alice's health, much more than all Scipio's fantastic expectations, that occupies my mind, and I set to work in earnest to see if I cannot find some work to do whereby I might earn our daily bread in case the business should prove a failure. Nice is a cosmopolitan city where numerous foreigners pitch their tents for the winter, and my favorite dream is that of coming across some powerful, extremely wealthy nobleman who shall give me employment as his secretary. I know nothing of the flower business or of bookkeeping, and it shames me to be useless, a drone in the hive. I pursue my inquiries in secret, applying to the employment agencies and the landlords of the principal hotels, but my researches are fruitless, and for more than a month I continue vainly to scour the city, seeking a salaried position. The things that we earnestly desire, however, most frequently come to pass unexpectedly, when we are weary with waiting and have given up all hope.

Scipio Mouginot has driven us over to Monaco one Sunday, and while he and Alice are inspecting the gardens I, incited by my curiosity, take a peep into the cardrooms. In those days Monte-Carlo was but a bare rock, scorched by the sun and planted with a few pine trees; what gambling there was was done in the

lower part of Monaco, in a house that was very unlike the magnificent palace of to-day.

I enter the roulette-room and loiter around the table surrounded with a fringe of absorbed players, not with the intention of trying my luck—my purse is too scantily filled for that—but to watch a scene that is entirely strange to me. I have been standing there only a short time when, among the punters bending over the green cloth, I observe a person whose long, lean face seems not unknown to me. The gentleman who has thus attracted my attention has long black hair combed back behind his ears, his black velvet sack shows signs of wear, he is industriously pricking holes with a pin in a card with many figures printed on it. I pass around to the other side of the table where I can obtain a front view—there is no longer any room for doubt: those sunken cheeks, that close-shaven chin, those ecstatic eyes can belong to no one but my quondam professor at Cornevin's, my instructor in the poetic art, Oscar Fencherot. Pleased to encounter a friend of other days amid these distant scenes, I retrace my steps to where the man of the velvet sack is standing and place my hand upon his shoulder; he turns petulantly, like an opium-smoker aroused untimely from an entrancing vision, and blinking solemnly at me out of his great dreamy eyes:

“My friend,” he says in his excessively urbane tone, “is not your name Jacques Mouginot?”

“Yes, it is I, Monsieur Fencherot; of course

it is I—very glad to see you and shake hands with you once more.”

“Most strange encounter, big with fate!” he theatrically exclaims, thrusting his card into his pocket and conducting me to a seat. “What are you doing here, Mouginot?”

I inform him of the causes that led up to our journey to Nice and mention my uncle’s new business; then I question him in turn on his own adventures and the reason of his being at Monaco.

“You ask what brought me to this land where croupiers, cacti and aloes flourish?” he replies. “Alas, dear friend, I shall have to answer you in the words of my brother poet, Persius: ‘The teacher of all liberal arts, the dispenser of intellect—the stomach!’ On leaving our poor friend Evariste’s establishment I found myself confronted with the ridiculous prospect of starving. I tried various methods, none of them very remunerative, for making an honest living, one of which was celebrating the virtues of a new kind of soap in rhymed verse; another, playing the rôle of lightning calculator at suburban fairs and selling a little book of instructions. Those expedients barely kept body and soul together. Then an old chum of mine, who has something to do with the advertising department of the sporting journals, sent me down here so that he might keep his patrons posted on what was going on among the roulette and trente-et-quarante players. “Once a Week” I send him a letter for the edification of swelldom in which I extol

the delights of Monaco to the seventh heaven and celebrate the seductions of the gambling-house. The work is not very high-toned and is not very well paid, but the croupiers are good to me, and I occasionally make a little something extra by risking a franc or two on the red or black."

"I am less speculatively inclined than you," I say in reply to my former preceptor, "but I would like to earn a little money and have been looking for some occupation to employ my leisure hours. Don't you know of some stranger here who needs a secretary?"

Oscar Fencherot scratches his nose contemplatively a moment, then, tossing back his long locks, exclaims:

"Hold on a bit, I think I can arrange matters for you. Some time ago I made acquaintance in the trent-et-quarante room with a Russian nobleman who is music-mad. He is composing an oratorio or something of the sort, and is looking for a competent man to write him a versified libretto in French. Naturally enough he applied to me, but I have registered a vow in heaven never to be the slave of musicians and their idiotic caprices, so I declined. The position is vacant still, and if you are less scrupulous—"

"I have not the least fragment of a scruple, my dear professor, and am ready to go ahead and rhyme as long as your friend desires."

"That's all right, then. My Russian's name is Nogaroff and he is staying at Nice. I will present you to him to-morrow."

We appoint a time and place for meeting the next day; I thank the heaven-sent Fencherot warmly and leave him to go and find my uncle.

On the morrow, at ten in the morning, Oscar, who has smartened himself up a bit, goes with me to M. Nogaroff's villa. We are ushered into a small salon where chairs and tables are loaded with music, bound and in sheets, and find our man seated at a grand piano. He is almost gigantic in stature, with long, flowing beard and Kalmuc features: pug nose, prominent cheek-bones and small blue eyes, set obliquely in his head, that seem to look at one caressingly. He receives us with an affectation of politeness and proceeds to inform me, speaking with a strong nasal accent, what it is that he requires from his future collaborator.

He is writing a lyrical symphony founded on Lermontof's "Demon," but as his work is intended for the French stage he wishes to have a French libretto adapted from the Russian poem, in accordance with instructions to be given by him, in which recitative shall alternate with lyric verse. The libretto is to embrace from five to six hundred lines and the pay will be five hundred francs.

Five hundred francs for five or six hundred lines! for a poor devil of a tyro like me it is Pactolus. I accept his proposal rapturously; he hands me a translation of the "Demon," and it is agreed that within two days I am to let him see a specimen of my skill.

That evening I devote to the perusal of Ler-

montof's poem; I make Samara's mishaps my own, and tackle to my task with such feverish ardor that on the second day I am able to submit to M. Nogaroff the forty lines of the introduction. He appears to be well pleased, and thereafter a large part of my nights is spent in rhyming. It does not take me long to discover, however, that the profession of librettist has its drawbacks no less than others. The Russian is enthusiastic and not niggardly of commendation, but he also has his streaks of ill-humor; he is fantastic, variable, hard to please, and more than once we have unpleasant disputes which always result in my being obliged to rewrite my verses to suit his caprice. I have to convert a duo into a monologue, where I had put rhymed stanzas he insists on having a recitative. At times I lose patience and am tempted to dissolve partnership with the Muscovite, whose drawling criticisms grate on my nerves, but I see before me in the distance the promised five hundred francs, flashing like a beacon light across a stormy sea, and then I take heart again. Finally the libretto, after having been pared and pruned and changed and rechanged some twenty times, is completed and stands erect on its somewhat shaky feet; M. Nogaroff gives it a last perusal, informs me that it is satisfactory, goes to his secretary, takes therefrom twenty-five louis, and placing the money in my hand, says in his nasal drawl:

“A thousand thanks, Monsieur Mouginot; I am highly pleased with your collaboration. I

hope you will not decline to favor me with your assistance another time should I have need of it. Drop in and see me sometimes ; another project may arise."

I thank him, delighted that Samara is off my hands ; still more delighted to hear jingling in my pocket the twenty-five gold pieces that I have earned by my labors and which will be something to fall back on if in the future the gales of adversity shall wreak their fury on the Garden of Armida.

Ah, me ! that blast of evil is speedily upon us. With the opening of February the weather, which until then had been of vernal mildness, suddenly changes and becomes cold and rainy. Squalls pour down through the clefts and gorges of the snow-clad mountains, chilling us with their icy breath and downpour of hail and sleet. The ramshackle old houses of Nice afford but scant protection to their inmates when Boreas makes his attack in earnest, and ours particularly, with its shop-door constantly swinging, is full of draughts and air currents. Alice has contracted a bad cold ; she coughs alarmingly. For all one month she is forced to keep her room, and the physician who attends her shakes his head ominously, just as did his confrere of Paris. Like all his profession, he is reticent and employs the customary hopeful common-places in speaking to us, but cannot conceal his opinion that the condition of the patient is very critical.

Fortune, too, has ceased to favor us with her smiles now that Alice is ill and no longer illu-

mines the shop and its heaped-up posies with her ethereal white beauty. Our bouquets, which under my little friend's fairy fingers used to have the appearance of breathing, sentient things, now assume a character of lifeless vulgarity. The customers seem to have noticed the absence of the "little Madonna"; they visit the place less frequently, our orders are less numerous and there is a falling off in the daily receipts. Whether Alice has guessed it or whether some words inconsiderately let fall by Uncle Scipio have informed her that our affairs are in a bad way is more than I can tell, but she is scarce more than recovered from her cold than she insists on coming downstairs and resuming her place in the shop. But customers, unfortunately, have forgotten the way to our establishment; the wind of popular favor that was wafting us along so nicely now goes to fill the sails of our more lucky rivals. In vain does our little fairy's talent compose baskets that are a feast for the eye, improvise bouquets arranged with such marvelous effects of color that they are like poetic creations; the fine ladies come to us no more and the young gentlemen go elsewhere for the flower with which to adorn the lapel of their coat. Still, Alice does not allow herself to be disheartened; she works industriously, animated by a sort of passion for the flowers that are brought us by the armful and that she cannot bear to leave.

To be thus confined unintermittently to a close room where the air is heavy with violent odors is not calculated to restore her health.

The emanations of the flowers, too strong for her debilitated organization, render the ailing girl weak and languid. Day by day she becomes paler and more emaciated. Her eyes alone, her magnificent black eyes, are unchanged, and even blaze with a brighter luster above her hollow cheeks. She eats scarcely anything; her strength is slowly leaving her; it taxes her powers to the utmost to mount and descend the stairs that conduct to the floor above the shop. We urge her to remain in her room and rest, but all to no purpose; she insists on keeping her place behind the counter and handling those plants that seem too heavy for her poor wasted fingers. Lingeringly, with painful effort, yet with loving care, she slowly gathers together the blooming sprays; it affords her an unwholesome pleasure to inhale the fragrance of the violets, to raise to her lips the clusters of dewy hyacinths. Suddenly a mist passes before her eyes, her head begins to swim, a waxen pallor overspreads her face; she is on the point of fainting, and lets fall upon the marble slab the unfinished bouquet whose intoxicating perfume suffocates her.

Little Alice is dying, slowly dying, among her flowers. She casts wistful looks, full of jealous admiration, on those fresh, lusty growths, so bright of hue, so abounding in life, that open wide their hungry mouths as if to rob her of the little breath she has left. When at midday I leave the house to go and attend on M. Nogaroff, who has lately made me his secretary, I see my little friend seated in a corner, a warm

shawl thrown about her attenuated shoulders, laboriously engaged in arranging violets in little bunches that our shop-boy sells on the Promenade des Anglais—for by this time customers have entirely ceased to come to us. My duties—copying manuscripts or reading aloud—occupy some three hours, and when I return I find her still at her post before the heaped-up pinks and roses, but with strength all gone; her breath comes thick and fast, her head is sunk wearily upon her breast and a hacking cough convulses her slight frame. Vainly I beseech her to rest; she will not listen; she cannot tear herself from those flowers that are killing her, but which still convey to her illusory reminders of life, its smiling joys and pleasures.

For—and it is a strange thing in this child who only a short while ago was so entirely weaned from all the delights of life—as the hour draws near when Death shall brush her with his wing, she is seized with a fierce desire to live and enjoy the pleasures of a youth that is so rapidly and insidiously slipping from her grasp. Never has she shown such eagerness to know what was going on outside our house, such curiosity in regard to shows and entertainments, such passionate love for perfume, light and color.

One morning that I had gone to the fields that lie along the Var in quest of our daily supply of violets, noticing a peach tree in full blossom, I cut off a branch and brought it to her. She had endeavored to go downstairs to

the shop, but her strength would not permit it, and on my return I found her reclining in a fauteuil near the low arched window, her emaciated form lost in a heavily wadded peignoir. A smile plays on her thin lips at sight of the delicate pink blooms, she eagerly takes the flower-laden branch from my hand and lays it lovingly against her cheek.

“How beautiful!” she sighs; “how like these blossoms are to living things! Oh, how I wish I might see the green fields once more! The peach trees must be covered with buds by this time, but I shall not live to see them open.”

Her great black eyes are riveted on my face as she gives utterance to these hopeless words and her look reads mine as if anxiously seeking to find a contradiction there.

“What an idea!” I reply, summoning a smile to my face with an effort that wrings my heart. “Why, certainly you will see them. The weather is coming off fine again, you will regain your strength, and we’ll have our little excursions as before.”

She eagerly grasps my hands in hers, that are burning hot. “I shall get well,” she pleads, “say, tell me, shall I not? A trifling cold like this, at my age, who ever dies of it? I am only sixteen, and I cannot bear to leave the world without having seen what life is like—I shall soon be able to go out in the glad sunshine, like the rest of you, and climb the hills down yonder where the wild hyacinths will be in bloom—promise me I shall, won’t you?”

“Yes, Alice, yes. As soon as you are able to

go out we will take you to Saint-Jean, and we'll spend a whole day there."

"Oh! I do so want to live! I cannot tell you how I envy girls who are strong and healthy and have some color in their cheeks — like your cousin Zelig, for example. Long ago, when we were in Paris, I was jealous of her robust appearance. There is a girl who is happy and can enjoy her youth! It is this close room that is taking away my strength. Give me your arm, Jacques; I think I will go down to the shop."

She rises and takes my arm, totters forward a few steps, then falls in a fainting condition back into her easy-chair. I summon the girl from the shop to assist me to place her on the bed and hurry from the room, my throat filled with thick-coming sobs, to find a place where I may shed my tears unseen. My uncle is not at home, but I must see him to tell him of my fears. For some weeks past, since our affairs have been going badly and our drafts have been coming back to us protested, Scipio Mouginot has conceived an aversion for his establishment; he keeps himself out of the way, haunting the seashore and the purlieus of the market, where he broods on the situation and dreams of other enterprises. I start out to hunt him up, and finally come across him at the corner of the Place Saint-Dominique. He is standing with legs apart, contemplatively regarding a building across whose front was a huge sign reading: *Navigation and Emigration Company*. I touch him on the shoulder and with some difficulty arouse him from his reverie.

“What’s the matter, Jacques ?” he inquires. “You alarm me with your scared face.”

“Uncle, Alice is very ill. I think it will be best for you to write at once to Mme. Clemence.”

“That’s just like you,” he exclaims with an impatient shrug, “forever exaggerating things ! What does the doctor say ?”

“I am going for him now, but write, uncle, I beseech you ! There is no time to lose, and Mme. Clemence would never forgive us should she not be allowed to embrace her daughter before — before all is ended.”

My uncle finally yields to my instances. Word is sent to Mme. Saintot, but it is uncertain if she will arrive in time, for the disease is making fearfully rapid progress. In order not to alarm the sick girl we tell her that her mother has been granted ten days’ leave of absence and is coming to spend her holiday at Nice. Alice awaits her arrival with feverish impatience, and it almost breaks our hearts to hear the programme of amusement she lays out against the time when Mme. Clemence shall be with us. At last a telegram informs us that the wretched mother has started on her journey. * On the morning of the day when she is expected by the Toulon diligence Alice insists on rising. She feels better, she declares, and requests that a basket of violets be brought to her.

“I wish to arrange a bouquet to welcome mamma,” she says.

She bunches and ties the fragrant blos-

soms, breathing laboriously under the effort and bending her ear to catch each passing sound in the street below. There is a noise of carriage wheels; she starts violently and rises half-way to her feet.

“She is here! she is here!” she faintly cries.

Then her head declines upon the pillow, the violets fall from her lap and are scattered on the floor. I utter a cry of horror and despair. All is over; little Alice, the gracious fairy of Villotte wood, is no more.

CHAPTER XV.

MME. CLEMENCE is too late; all that is afforded to her embrace is the wasted form of her dead daughter. My heart is lacerated by the spectacle of the poor woman's grief. She cannot be made to tear herself from the lifeless form of her adored child, whose beauteous features are scarcely changed in death, and whom she presses to her bosom with despairing tenderness. We are compelled to resort to stratagem to induce her to leave the chamber while the dead girl's remains are being placed in a coffin that is filled to overflowing with lilies - of - the - valley, roses and white lilacs. Through the streets of the old town we conduct all that is left of little Alice, to the cemetery of the Chateau, whence there is an outlook over the mountains and the sea. Mme. Clemence, supported by Uncle Scipio and me, follows the cortege courageously to the terrace

where the grave has been prepared, but there the parting scene is heart-rending ; the afflicted mother faints as the coffin is lost to sight in the cold ground and we are compelled to carry her back to the carriage. The next day she insists on returning to Paris by an early train. I can understand the feeling of horror that the Garden of Armida inspires in her ; she feels that it is responsible for hastening her child's death, and the sight of the heaped-up flowers upon the counters adds to and intensifies her grief. We go with her to where she is to take the diligence. As we are about to part she takes me by the arm, and drawing me to one side :

“ You loved her,” she murmurs. “ Promise me that you will have a stone placed over her grave and will not abandon her to solitude in this land of strangers. Go and visit her now and then in her last resting-place, as you used to come and visit her when she was with me.”

I pledge my word to respect her wishes, and the heavy diligence rumbles off over the cobblestones of the Rue de France, bearing away to Paris the bereaved mother for whom there is henceforth to be no joy in life.

I am left standing on the pavement alone with Scipio Mouginot, and not a word do we address to each other as we return to our lonely abode. My uncle is become strangely taciturn and gloomy ; he seems to be revolving in his mind some sinister project, the nature of which I cannot divine. As for myself, I lead, as it were, a twofold existence : the material part of

me fulfills mechanically its daily allotted task, but my spirit is absent on the distant hillside, floating above the grave where rest the mortal remains of Alice. I know no peace save when thinking or acting for her. Out of my earnings I have paid for the plot in the cemetery, and now I order a memorial to mark the place where she lies buried—a plain tombstone of white marble on which is to be chiseled the inscription: “Alice Saintot, Aged Sixteen.” The promise I made the mother I observe scrupulously, and each day, on leaving my employer, I bend my steps to the cemetery of the Chateau, bearing flowers to strew upon the grave.

I remain there until it is time for the gates to close, pacing the terrace where the ground is covered with a fresh growth of grass, among which johnny-jump-ups lift their pretty faces. I converse in thought with my dead darling, I summon up every memory that speaks to me of her—from the time when we saw each other first at the Hotel du Cygne down to our last interview in her little bedroom, when I brought her the branch of peach blossoms. One afternoon, about two weeks subsequent to the funeral, I am in the cemetery in accomplishment of my daily pilgrimage. It is early April; there have been showers of rain and sleet during the morning and great white clouds edged with black are hanging still about the summits of the highest of the mountains; elsewhere the sky is of a very deep, pure blue. Through the vapors gathered over Esterel the setting sun

casts a dull, pale light that imparts silvery tones to the olive groves on the low hills, where villas, scattered here and there, make bright spots of white and pink against the more sober green. Among the holm oaks and carobs of the Chateau the blackbirds are whistling, just as they do at home, and carry me back for the time being to Villotte and its forest. Down in the valley there is a bluish mist floating in the air and veiling the city, which I should not know was there were it not for the bells faintly tinkling from the steeples of the churches ; all that the eye can see is the amphitheater of pale-green hills, the rugged mountain-sides clad with verdure of a darker hue, and the wide, milky blue expanse of sea. Behind me, in the hollow where lies the port of Lympia, I hear the deep sound of a steamer's whistle, and fifteen minutes later I behold the Marseilles packet creeping out on the pale azure of the Mediterranean and gaining her offing, trailing behind her a long plume of smoke.

I know not why, but a shivering sensation of evil seizes me. The sight of the steamer receding toward the dim, vaporous horizon is a painful reminder to me that I am in a strange land, far, very far, from home and friends. A feeling of melancholy that will not be shaken off takes possession of me, changing the current of my reflections and inclining them to considerations of a purely material order. I reflect on our situation and its increasing difficulties. The death of our little fairy has been a death-blow to the Garden of Armida ; the sale

of our flowers has almost entirely ceased, and I feel that a crisis is at hand. What is to become of us when our resources are finally exhausted? How will my uncle stand this fresh catastrophe? Each new day beholds him more anxious and careworn; it seems to me that he whose bright anticipations it requires so much to dash is yielding to deepest discouragement. His face has lost its light, the source of his facile eloquence is choked. He is a man with whom the impression of the moment counts for everything, and under the impulse of some great trial is capable of going to extremes. He left the house this morning before I did, he did not return to partake of our noonday breakfast, and remembering this circumstance forebodings of impending evil force themselves on my mind. Can it be that Scipio Mouginot, wearied with his struggles, confronted by a situation from which he can see no issue, has determined to bid farewell to life? My boyish imagination once started on that track, the more I reflect on it the more probable does the theory of suicide appear to me. An unutterable terror seizes and holds me; I behold my uncle weltering in his blood with a great hole in his head where the fatal bullet has crashed through, and springing up the steps of the terrace four at a time I hasten, my fears lending me wings, to the Rue Saint-Francais-de-Paule. A great shudder passes over me as I cross the threshold of the Garden of Armida, where our sole assistant, his occupation gone, is slumbering peacefully in a

corner, his chair tilted back against the wall. A deathlike stillness pervades the apartment. I climb the stairs, I enter my uncle's chamber, and the first thing that strikes my eye in the empty room where everything is in disorder is a letter, conspicuously displayed on the top of the writing-table. I draw near and read the superscription: "To be delivered to my nephew, Jacques Mouginot." There is no longer room for doubt; my presentiments did not deceive me, and my unhappy uncle has ended his days! With a trembling hand I break the seal. This is what Scipio Mouginot has to say to me:

"MY DEAR CHILD—You will do me the justice to admit that I have struggled with all my might against the ill-luck that for some time past has attended all my enterprises. For a moment I thought that I was about to win the battle, but Fate willed otherwise. So long as my presence here was necessary to others I stood firm at my post; now, our dear Alice is in heaven, Mme. Clemence has her daily bread assured to her and you, thanks to your powerful Russian, are in a position to create for yourself an honorable and respected future; consequently there is nothing to keep me longer in this old worn-out world of routine and prejudice and can obey with a clear conscience the inclination that calls me away to a younger and a richer continent. I have sold the stock and good-will of the Garden of Armida and the purchaser will take possession to-morrow. As for me, I have decided to shift my musket to the other shoulder, and, shaking the dust from my feet, to slip my cable for America, the land of freedom and magnificent enterprises. When you read these lines the Marseilles mail boat will be bearing me away to a port where I shall find a berth on the

steamer for New York, and once there I am convinced that I shall have no trouble in restoring my shattered fortune and that I shall return to you some day with well-filled pockets and a face of conscious rectitude. While awaiting the mutual joy of our meeting at some future day, dear friend, work; you are young — be yours “the long hopes and vast imaginings!” Be mindful of my old device: *Laboremus!* and rest assured, dear Jacques, that, whatever distance part us, you will always have the affection and best wishes of your faithful and devoted uncle, —

SCIPIO MOUGINOT.”

I am at the same time amazed and disgusted by this letter. So, while I was tenderly lamenting my uncle's hard fate, while I was picturing him to myself as a desperate man harboring projects of suicide, while I was working myself up to a fever of anxiety, he was concocting this lame and trivial apology for his shameless flight, untouched by any feeling of remorse that he was leaving an eighteen-year-old nephew alone and unfriended in a strange city! The past year has served to cure me of many of my illusions regarding Scipio Mouginot, but this is the last straw that breaks the camel's back; the scales fall from my eyes at the thought of such utter selfishness and cold-bloodedness. I call to mind my good Grandma Pechoin's ideas concerning him, and I feel that they are more than justified. Yes, the excellent old lady was right: Scipio's follies are always more prejudicial to others than to himself, and he never fails to arrange matters so that *he* shall come out of the puddle dry-footed.

“After all,” I reflect, suddenly coming back

to myself and my affairs, "I may as well bring my lamentations to an end; it won't mend matters should I keep them up till morning. Now that I am abandoned to my own resources I must make up my mind what I am going to do. And first of all I must clear out from here, since my uncle has sold everything and the new occupant is to take possession of the premises to-morrow."

I descend to the shop, and, shaking the slumbering attendant to consciousness, interrogate him; he confirms my uncle's statement and informs me that the Garden of Armida is sold to a merchant of Marseilles, who proposes to start business there as a dealer in olive oil and Southern fruits. I hurry off at once and hire an extremely modest room in a house in the Rue des Poucettes, then proceed to move the few goods and chattels that call me owner. I stuff books and clothes haphazard into my trunk, I bid a last farewell to the little chamber where Alice breathed her last, I take from the wall as a souvenir a small oval mirror that she was accustomed to make use of and in which I imagine that I can still see her pale face reflected; then, sorrowfully leaving the scene of so much suffering, I start forth and reach my new domicile just at nightfall.

The room, small and low of ceiling, has the wretched, cheerless look that is common to cheap lodging-houses. Its windows face the quai, and on the lonely beach beyond the roadway I can hear the swash of the sea as the

waves roll in and break. The monotonous, somnolent sound, which commences and runs along the pebbly shore like a long-drawn plaint, has no soothing in it for my sad soul. As Oscar Fencherot would say, I feel nostalgic shudders passing o'er me. I would wish to be gone from this city of pleasure with which I have nothing in common and where I no longer have a home. But whither am I to turn for shelter? Where am I to find the domestic fireside that I so greatly miss, the tender friendship and consolation of which I am in such deep need? Paris, where my only acquaintances have been Bohemians like the Cornevins, selfish egotists like Scipio, or victims like Mme. Clemence—Paris has no attractions for me; on the contrary, I feel a species of repugnance for it. Then my thoughts revert, with a regretful feeling in my heart, to my dear little village of Villotte, where every one was known to me and every one a friend. In the darkness of the night the peaceful lullaby of the sea gently raises my soul and transports it as in a dream to the lowly valleys of the Barrois—where the hillsides are covered with a broidery of vineyards, where Petit-Jure woods are green, and the paper mill of Jeand'heurs reposes in tranquillity beneath the great trees of the park. I feel myself seized and carried away by an overmastering desire to revisit the scenes of my boyhood, to be once more in that land of fog and lush, rank growths, so different from this sunlit, sunburnt provence, whose joyous luminosity contrasts too sharply now with my poor

wrung, aching feelings. I do not question myself as to what I am to do when I am once down there, or at what door I am to knock, or how I shall be received. I only reflect what a delicious satisfaction it will be to bathe once more as of old in the cool stream, to gaze again upon the old familiar faces of men and things; I yield to that imperious instinct that bids the stricken deer return to his covert to die, and firmly resolve to return to Villotte at the earliest moment possible.

Before carrying this project into execution, however, I have to devise ways and means of providing for the cost of the journey, for the expense of Alice's burial has exhausted my small capital. I therefore conclude to continue my secretarial functions at M. Nogaroff's until such time as I shall have amassed a sufficient fund. In this way six weeks drag slowly on, during which almost all my time is spent at the villa of the Russian gentleman. I spend scarcely anything, for M. Nogaroff, in order that he may have the utmost benefit of my services, gives me my breakfast and dinner. I allow myself only that which I cannot dispense with. I save up my pennies like a miser, and about the end of May I find myself with a sufficiently well-filled purse to permit me to think of preparing for my journey. Then, too, it is time to be flitting, for the season is ended and the pleasure-seeking tourists are dispersing like swallows at the approach of winter. My Russian, it is true, has conceived an infatuated liking for me and proposes to take me with

him to Moscow, but I decline the flattering offer. He pays me the balance due me, and we part on excellent terms with each other. When I have paid all my outstanding bills I find I have three hundred francs remaining. I go to the cemetery to pay a parting visit. I arrange with the gardener to keep Alice's grave in order; then, having deposited my last tribute, a bunch of roses, on it, I pursue my way cityward, sadly enough, down the Rue du Chateau.

On the following morning at an early hour I am at the starting-place of the diligence and climb to my seat on the roof of the lumbering vehicle. The driver gathers up the reins, gives his leaders a flick of the whip, and presently we are rolling amid clouds of dust along the road that leads to the capital.

The way is long from Nice to Villotte. I shall not weary the reader with the incidents of the journey, my nights spent in railway cars or primitive, uncomfortable stage-coaches, my compulsory stoppages at Marseilles, Dijon and Langres, or my ingenious devices for traveling at the smallest possible modicum of expense. During the entire trip I am anxiously cogitating on what my course is to be when I finally arrive at my little town. Shall I go directly on to Jeand'heurs, or shall I stop and present myself and my humiliation at the Mouginot-Pechoin's establishment? The hoarse breathing of the locomotive and the tinkling of the little bells on the horses' collars form a monotonous refrain accompanying the engrossing question that keeps continually jiggling it

through my brain and will not down : Shall I, or shall I not, go to my uncle Victor's ? The prospect of the visit has nothing alluring in it. And still, now that I am returning to the place, it seems to me no more than right that I should go and see my former guardian, if only to inform him of this last prank of his brother's and let him know that henceforth he is dispensed from paying the quarterly subsidy for my board and lodging. I know not what to do, and when at last on a fine evening in June the way-train deposits me at Villotte station between seven and eight o'clock, I have reached no determination.

The town appears to me to have changed considerably since I saw it last. Houses have gone up in the vacant fields around the station, and among them is a staring inn, magniloquently styled : *Hotel de l'Wuivers*. I bend my steps toward its door on leaving the station, engage a room, and having first washed the dust and cinders from my face, go down into the street. Twilight is descending on the scene ; the sidewalks, where a man is running to and fro with his torch lighting the gas-lamps, are in semi-darkness. Crossing the new bridge that connects the station with the town and lands me on the Quai des Gravieres, I steer my course, still only half decided, for the abode of the Mouginot-Pechoins. I stop to listen to the plashing of the little stream as it speeds rippling under the arches of the Notre-Dame bridge and to the foliage of the poplars rustling in the evening breeze ; the sounds fall on my ear like the voices of old friends ; I traverse

the dark and malodorous passage of the Corps-de-l'Huis. Nearly all the shops are closed; the quarter seems to be composing itself to slumber in the fast-fading light. Alone my uncle Victor's drug store casts abroad the ruddy glare of its gas-lights and the blue and yellow fires of its great globes of crystal on the gathering obscurity of the street.

My irresolution increases as I approach the door. "There is no hurry," I say to myself, and by way of gaining time assure myself that the family are probably at supper and it will look better for me to wait until they have finished their repast; they might attribute ulterior designs to me should I drop in just as they are sitting down at table. The street is nearly deserted, and besides that I don't much care if I do attract the attention of the neighbors; I have grown stouter since my departure from Villotte and am so changed as not to fear recognition. By loitering before the shop for a while I can watch those within at my ease and get an idea how the land lies.

Yes, they are at supper. As the evening is very warm the sash of the window opening into the pharmacy has been raised, and through the aperture I obtain a distinct view of a good bit of the dining-room, which is lighted by a lamp with a green shade. I catch glimpses of Mme. Mouginot-Pechoin's severe profile, Aristide's proboscidian nose and the revolving arms of Lawyer Jacobi, who doubtless is laying down the law as usual. Men and material objects alike are unchanged in physiognomy; it seems

no longer ago than yesterday that Arsene Camus and I left Villotte together and went to Tremont. The shop retains its ancient coldly methodical appearance; the stock-in-trade is arranged in the same gold-labeled drawers in accordance with the nature of the drugs. I recognize the shelf allotted to the alcoholic preparations, that of the herbs and floral medicaments, and that of the dried fruits, whence I used to purloin an occasional date or fig in the old days; the earthenware jars are there, too, shaped like cinerary urns, in which pomades and ointments are kept. The members of the household are equally unchanged. Were I to enter the room at this moment I feel morally certain that I should be welcomed by the same old sarcasms from madame, the same ill-natured laughter from Aristide, the same pretentious oration from M. Jacobi. Matters would be even worse in all probability, for the manner of my flight from Jeand'heurs, the fact that I cast my fortunes in with Scipio Mouginot and the news of my uncle's latest financial exploit cannot have predisposed the people of the pharmacy in my favor; it would be as much as ever if I could count on old Mme. Pechoin's favor. And supposing they should be charitably enough inclined to grant me a place at their board and fireside, they certainly would not kill the fatted calf for me and I should have to eat humble-pie for a long time in order to earn my pardon. I have a presentiment how it will be; brutal snubs from Uncle Victor, sneers and gibes from Aristide, wise saws with-

out end from Lawyer Jacobi. I know what my disposition is : I shall never be able to endure their taunts and reproaches with any degree of patience ; my choler will rise, I shall give them as good as they send, and the fat will all be in the fire again. Candidly, with such a result in view, is it worth my while to cross the threshold of that inhospitable house ? My stubborn pride and sense of self-respect answer that it is not, and I remain standing on the sidewalk, weighing the pros and cons. A customer enters the shop just at this moment and Uncle Victor comes out to wait on him. His face is more phlegmatic than ever, his lips more tightly shut, his eye more stony. He casts one of his freezing looks toward the door ; I imagine that he scents me and is on the point of singing out : “ You will never be anything but a dunce ! ”

The idea of going up to that dreadful Uncle Victor and saying “ Good-evening ! ” to him, terrifies me and decides the question in the negative—no, I will not enter the house ! I turn abruptly on my heel, and hurrying my steps as if in fear to be pursued, make the best of my way out of the Rue du Bourg and return to my hotel.

On reaching there I order a frugal supper, and while eating my cold veal consider what is best for me to do. There is but one refuge left me, now that I have returned to my old home and cannot bring myself to become a member of Uncle Victor’s household, and that is Jeand’heurs. There, at all events, I shall find kind friends. It may gall my vanity a little to

knock for admission at their door after having continuously rejected their advances, but I can rely on their affectionate indulgence and shall have no mortifications to endure in that quarter. Yes, to morrow, soon as it is dawn, I will strike out and foot it to Jeand'heurs, and next morning at peep of day I am ascending the road that leads to the woods of the upper town.

Up to this time the excitement of the journey and my uncertain frame of mind as to my future domicile have operated to detract from the pleasure of my home-coming, but now I enjoy to the full the delight of "seeing all and recognizing all I see." I listen with a charmed ear to the bells sounding the angelus with their old familiar voices, I look with a friendly eye on the antique, quaintly carved fronts of the dwellings of the upper town. When I enter the woods, where the birds of spring have not yet ceased singing, the strains of my old acquaintances, the nightingales and the red-wings, cheer my heart with a sensation of gladness to which it has long been a stranger.

The forest exhales delicious odors; the fragrance of the wild honeysuckle mingles with the penetrating breath of the sweet-woodruff, and these emanations from my native soil seem to me sweeter a hundred-fold than all the bouquets of Nice. The beeches and witch-elms in their fresh spring suits of tender green have a friendly air of kinship that I have never found in the carobs and cork trees of the Cornice road with their unchanging, metallic foliage.

Here, the sentiment that predominates over all else is that of *home*. On coming to the edge of the wood the plains of Combles and Veel suddenly appear before me, gently undulating in the clear morning light.

Here is Tremont, just awaking to the murmur of its whispering stream. Here is Renesson with its factory, all a-hum with the noise of the busy spindles, and here is the black path of slag that conducts to the furnaces of Jean-d'heurs. I cross the park of the Chateau, where all is peaceful quiet and the thick-topped chestnut trees are mirrored in the bosom of the sleepy Saulx. Yet a few steps further and I shall meet the path that ends at the door of the paper mill. My heart thumps violently against my ribs, and an overpowering sense of shame oppresses me as I reflect that soon I shall have to confess what a horrible mess I have made of my affairs.

Now I can hear the water pouring over the dam and the cocks crowing in the barnyard. A fresh fit of impatience seizes me and I start off on a run for the house, where Cousin Delorme's dogs receive me at the gate as a stranger and an intruder, barking furiously.

A female figure, clad in bright attire, comes out upon the stoop, attracted by the clamors of the pack — there can be no mistake, it is my cousin Zélie. Her hands appear to clutch the guard-rail, as if her first emotion of surprise were too much for her; then she braces herself and stands motionless, seemingly wondering who the stranger can be that enters their

courtyard at such an hour, And yet she has a good pair of eyes and must have recognized me as I did her. This coldness on Zelié's part disconcerts me and I pause, doubtful whether to advance or not. Then she turns and re-enters the vestibule, and I hear her cry, in a voice trembling with emotion :

“ Papa, come here, quick ! It's Jacques ! ”

A moment later I am shaking hands with Cousin Delorme.

“ So, here you are, you vagabond ! ” the cousin laughingly exclaims ; “ come, give your *cousines* a kiss.”

“ You have come back to us at last ! Oh, how glad I am ! ” says Zelié.

“ You are just in the nick of time,” M. Delorme continues ; “ we are about to see what Mme. Delorme has given us to eat this morning, and you shall have something to stay your stomach until dinner.”

He pushed me before him toward the dining-room, but before breaking bread with them I wish to inform him briefly of my situation and murmur confusedly in his ear :

“ Cousin, you were right in what you said to me two years ago. Things have not turned out well, and I am come back to you, like the prodigal son—”

He interrupts :

“ It is well ; I thought as much. But sit down and eat your breakfast. We will talk the matter over afterward.”

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER breakfast M. Delorme and I betake ourselves to the garden, where, perambulating the alley of gooseberry bushes that skirts the Saulx, we have a lengthy conversation. I tell him everything: our trip to Nice,* how the Garden of Armida flourished and declined, the death of my little friend and the manner of Scipio Mouginot's flitting. He listens to my narrative patiently, and when I have concluded:

"I am not in the least surprised by what you tell me," he says with a shrug of the shoulders. "At the time of my visit to you in the Rue de Conde I predicted that your uncle's grand schemes would come to grief. You have learned a lesson early in life which will make you think twice hereafter before you relinquish the substance for the shadow. The position that I have it in my power to offer you is not a brilliant one; your duties will consist in superintending the assorting of the rags, and now and then you will lend a hand to help me with the correspondence. In the course of a few years you will be competent to fill a foreman's place. Does my proposition suit you?"

I thank Cousin Delorme heartily, assuring him that I am entirely cured of my vainglorious aspirations and desire nothing better than to earn an honest living.

"Then that is settled," he replies; "I will write to M. Mouginot-Pechoin to-night and tell him of Scipio's flight and that you have taken up your quarters at the paper mill. Also, as you are now past eighteen years old, we will petition the judge at Villotte to declare your minority ended. To-morrow you will enter on your duties at the mill, but before putting off the old skin for the new and beginning a new

existence I want to say a word or two to you for your guidance in life. In the first place, dismiss the notion that chance has anything to do with our affairs ; it has not, and the expression 'ill-luck' is but a form of speech that men employ to cloak their own ineptitude. Destiny does not make the man, it is the man who makes his destiny, as the spider weaves her web. Next, what is gained in speed is lost in power, and those who, after the manner of your uncle Scipio, cherish dreams of fortune coming to them as if by miracle are either dupes or knaves. Success is attained only by patient effort, repeated day by day. Impress it firmly on your mind that those fortunes which, like mushrooms, are the growth of a single morning, are always of brief duration. And now go find your cousins, and rest to-day that you may work with a stouter heart to-morrow."

The honest fellow's words give me a sensation of cheer and comfort. I return to the house and proceed to make myself at home in my little chamber of other days, which has been aired and put in order as if by magic. The boughs of the tall trees in the park sway to and fro before my open window as if waving me a greeting, and a great bunch of roses in an earthen jar that Zelig has brought in and placed on my table fill the apartment with a delicious odor of summer. On going downstairs to join the family at the midday dinner I find my fair cousin awaiting me in the hall ; she has made some changes in her attire since morning, and I am astonished to discover in her a grace and beauty that I was far from expecting. The half-grown country girl, with rustic manners and ill-cut, vulgar gowns, is replaced by a healthy-looking, robust young woman, whose plain and scrupulously neat clothing allows her freedom of movement and at the same time sets

off the flexibility of her figure and the agreeable curves of bust and shoulders. Her chestnut hair, arranged without any attempt at style, falls over her low, broad forehead in little rebellious curls, which form a very pleasing and harmonious accompaniment to the clear, blue eyes and frank, ingenuous face, rather plentifully spotted with freckles.

She seats herself at my side, fills my plate with the choicest morsels, and brings all her fund of cheerful gayety to bear to amuse me and make me feel at ease. As soon as we have drunk our coffee she puts on a hat of rough straw, and turning to me with a smile, says :

“If you are not too tired we will go and revisit some of the old familiar scenes.”

I assent with great pleasure, and we traverse the little village of Lisle-en-Rigault, afterward ascending the stream as far as Ville-sur-Saulx. Now my gaze rests with emotion on the familiar, unassuming landscape, and it seems to me that I have foregathered with old friends.

“There is nothing changed, is there?” exclaims Zélie, who is observing me to see how I am affected. “It is as if you had left Jeand’heurs but yesterday—”

“The country is the same, cousin, but still there is a change here. You are a great deal taller and have grown amazingly pretty since I went away.”

“Be still, you flatterer ! I know all about it, and am not such a ninny as to consider myself pretty. I am not to be mentioned in the same breath as your little friend Alice.”

I look at Zélie with an expression of sorrowful surprise.

“Alas, my dear cousin, you were only too correct in your predictions. Alice was consumptive ; she is dead.”

“Ah, merciful Heavens! Forgive me, Jacques, if I have caused you pain.”

I look at her again, seeking in her eyes that kindly sympathy that has such power of healing for the afflicted, but am astonished, almost shocked indeed, to see no trace there of the pity on which I had been counting. I cannot understand it; it occurs to me that if she displays less emotion than I had reason to expect it is because I was too brief and curt in informing her of the loss from which my heart is bleeding still, and thereon I proceed to place before her every most touching circumstance of Alice's illness and death. But I fail to perceive that Zelig is listening impatiently, and that while I go talking on and on her fingers are plucking nervously at a stack of wheat gathered in an adjoining field.

She turns to retrace her steps, and when I have at last come to the end of my relation my cousin sighs and observes:

“Doubtless it is sad to leave the world so young, but it must have been a great comfort to her on her deathbed to know that she was loved so fondly up to the very end.”

It was no exaggeration on my part when I confessed ingenuously to my cousin that the dear departed still had entire possession of my thoughts. My heart sorrows for Alice gone as it did on the first day of her loss; her pale, thin face and big brown eyes, bright with inward fever, are constantly before me, I hear the anguished tones of her voice pleading for life; and I cannot accustom myself to the idea that we are to meet no more on earth. During the first few days of my employment at the mill this posthumous tenderness for the little angel who has spread her wings and left us for a better world renders me inattentive to my duties and draws down on me kindly admonitions from my cousin. However, toil is a most potent com-

forter; I am far from forgetting little Alice, but imperceptibly my grief is lulled to slumber; when I think of her now it is not with feelings of bitterness, but with a gentle melancholy, similar to that which we experience at the sound of sweet bells rung at eventide amid the silent fields.

What contributes most, together with my occupation, toward alleviating my sorrow is having my cousin Zelig near me. Mlle. Delorme's kindness and wholesome good-humor act on me as does the salubrious air of the uplands on the convalescent whose strength has been wasted by long confinement to the sick-room. The more I see of Zelig the more do I appreciate the quickness of her intelligence, the frankness of her disposition and the peculiar charm that resides in her expressive countenance. As Alice's image grows fainter the living personality of Zelig begins to occupy a more prominent position in my daily life. Six months have not rolled over my head since I took up my quarters at Jeand'heurs, and I perceive that my boyish affection for my cousin is transmuted into a deeper and more tender sentiment.

As I become more and more convinced of the insidious change that is going on within me anxious scruples take possession of my mind. I feel that I am falling in love with Zelig, and I ask myself if that love will not result in unpleasant consequences for me. Penniless orphan as I am, a common day-laborer in the mill, received and sheltered by the kind Delormes almost from charity, have I the right to raise my eyes to Zelig? When one is nineteen years old the strongest arguments that reason can adduce are powerless to restrain those sentiments that rise in our hearts as the sap rises in the trees beneath the warm sun of April. The very utmost that I can force myself to do, by sheer effort of the will, is to dis-

seemle my passion, so that Zelié may not divine my secret.

But my good resolutions are all taken to no purpose, for she seems to have no idea how the case stands with me. She is as cordial and affectionate as ever, but with the least shade of a reserve that I never saw in her before. When we go out to walk together of a Sunday, which we do infrequently, our intercourse is not marked by that frank familiarity, those friendly confidences, that characterized our *tete-a-tetes* before my departure for Paris and even, at a later period, at Scipio Mouginot's.

We are walking together one May morning when chance directs our steps to the little wood where once, in one of my vacations, I had my finger nipped by a bird that I took incautiously from the snare, and when Zelié came so generously to my rescue. The chaffinches are piping to one another in the copses, the leaves of the hazel bushes are beginning to unfold and a balmy odor of spring pervades the air. I recognize the place, and turning to my cousin, who is gazing absently into the spring :

“We have been here before, cousin,” I say to her. “Do you remember the occasion?”

“It may be as you say,” she replies with a blush; “we went pretty much everywhere during the vacation that you spent at Jeand’heurs, but this spot reminds me of nothing in particular.”

“And yet the place has its story: we had snared a bluejay here, and the bird tore my finger with its beak. I have not forgotten the way you dressed the hurt.”

“I had not given you credit for having so good a memory,” she replies, a little tartly; “we have given up setting snares for the little birds now, and you are not likely to have a similar accident happen you again.” Whereon

she turns on her heel and leaves the wood with an air of displeasure.

There can be no doubt but that her intention was to give me to understand that our old-time intimacy is ended for good and all, and that I am to forget our bygone days of comradeship and remember only the distance that parts us now. She, wrapping herself in her cloak of assumed reserve, and I, torturing myself every instant of my life to appear other than I am—we both do our best, as if of malice aforethought, to aggravate the misunderstanding that is building up a wall of ice between us.

In the meantime weeks, months, years are passing. M. Delorme is satisfied with me, and when on my twenty-first birthday a bottle of old wine is brought in at dinner to celebrate my coming of age, he informs me that one of the foremen is about to leave the works and I am to have the place thus vacated.

Zelie is verging on her nineteenth year; she is more amiable and prepossessing than ever, without the slightest trace of coquetry. As she is an only daughter, and as her good looks, pleasing manners and sterling qualities are known far and wide throughout the country, there is no lack of suitors for her hand. Greatly to my surprise, and no less to my satisfaction, I may say, she rejects them all, one after another, alleging various specious reasons.

One winter day, just as we are about to seat ourselves at table for the midday meal, the postman comes to the door and hands in M. Delorme's mail. A black-bordered envelope, half hidden among the numerous letters and circulars, is the first to attract the superintendent's attention. He breaks the seal, reads it rapidly and hands it to me.

"Bless me!" he exclaims, "that is a bad bit of news to reach us just as we are sitting down to our soup. Your uncle Mouginot-Tupin is

dead, Jacques—carried off by an attack of pneumonia. You did not know him very well, and his death won't be a great affliction to you, but after all he was your uncle, and we must observe the proprieties. The funeral is to-morrow."

The next morning, just on the stroke of ten, we drive into the upper town and stop before the house of mourning, the front of which is sumptuously draped with black, and enter the darkened drawing-room where the relatives and friends of the deceased are collected. My aunt Mouginot-Tupin, more impressive than ever in her voluminous widow's weeds, rises and salutes majestically whenever a person of note comes into the room, then she sinks back into her fauteuil and applies her handkerchief to her eyes. Cousin Delorme and I have to content ourselves as best we may with a nod of the head, so slight as barely to be perceptible. Every one gives us the cold shoulder. The announcement of the clergyman's arrival comes opportunely to relieve us from this disagreeable situation. We follow the coffin down the stairs and take our place behind Uncle Victor, at the head of the cortege whose destination is the church. The building is crowded with dignitaries, civic, ecclesiastical and military, and the voices of the singers float on the air accompanied by the low, muffled tones of the great organ. It is evident that the widow, assured that she is to inherit all the property of her deceased husband, has determined not to skimp his obsequies. On emerging from the cemetery, however, where we are compelled to listen to an interminable discourse delivered by Lawyer Jacobi, I see Maitre Lespaillaudel, the notary of the upper town, approach Uncle Victor with a mysterious air. A whispered colloquy ensues between them; then they call up Cousin Delorme and the three confer together gravely.

“There is something new, it seems,” M. De-lorme whispers when he comes back to the place where I am standing; “your uncle Palamede has left a will, and we are requested to be present at the house of the deceased at two o’clock.”

To our surprise the widow is complaining angrily that “her poor Palamede” should have manifested so little confidence in her, and we learn that M. Mouginot-Tupin, quite unbeknown to his better half, has made a will and deposited it in M. Despaillaudel’s office for safekeeping, but that this will, in accordance with the expressed wishes of the deceased, is only to be opened in presence of his brothers and their lawful heirs. To sum it all up briefly, it is decided that, as Scipio Mouginot is out of the country and no one knows his address, steps shall be taken forthwith to ascertain his present place of residence, and that until his return matters shall remain in the same condition that they are in now.

In pursuance of this resolution, a few days later the following advertisement is to be seen on the fourth page of all the principal newspapers :

“M. Scipio Mouginot, whose last known place of residence was at Nice, in the Rue Saint-Francois-de-Paule, is requested to present himself with as little delay as possible, either in person or by his lawfully constituted attorney, at the office of M. Lespaillaudel, notary at Villotte, in order to be present at the opening of the will of his brother, the late Palamede Mouginot, deceased the 12th day of January, 1862.”

Two months go by without my uncle Scipio giving any sign of his being in the land of the living, and we are all beginning to fear that the luckless man has himself met an obscure death

in some far distant city of the New World. We are sitting around the stove one very stormy evening in March, warming ourselves and waiting for supper to be announced, when the bell rings, the dogs set up a loud barking, and a servant informs M. Delorme that there is a man at the door who wishes to speak to him.

"Tell him to come in," my cousin says to Zélie.

The door opens again and admits a stranger, heavily bearded and rather poorly clad, so far as we can discern in the semi-darkness of the ill-lighted room.

"Uncle Scipio!"

The hands that he extends to us are trembling visibly. M. Delorme maintains an attitude of cold reserve, and even I respond with no great cordiality to my relative's embrace.

"Monsieur Delorme, I come to you as came Themistocles to Artaxerxes, King of the Persians. I have crossed the Atlantic twice, I have experienced the tempests of adversity and the storms of ocean, but nothing has been able to daunt my courage or destroy my hopefulness. I should still be out there, tugging at the oar, had I not learned that my relatives had need of me. Enterprises of brightest promise I abandoned incomplete, and I come with all speed, poor but with a name as ever stainless, and my first visit is for you."

"I feel deeply honored," M. Delorme curtly replies, "but why did you not stop first at Villotte? Have you not heard of your brother Palamede's death?"

"Oh, yes, I read Notary Lespaillaudel's advertisement in the New York *Herald* and took passage on the first steamer. But I wanted to thank you for the hospitality you have temporarily afforded my nephew—I desired to embrace this dear child once more."

I am again subjected to his embrace, am

again strained to the pepper-and-salt jacket ; then my uncle, quite unabashed, takes a chair and holds his wet boots against the stove.

"Seeing that you are here, M. Scipio Mouginot," M. Delorme coldly replies, "we will try to find you a place to sleep. We were just about to sit down to supper, and my wife will arrange a place for you. Do the people of Villette know of your return?"

"Yes," Scipio negligently replies, "I stopped and notified M. Lespaillaudel as I came along. The will is to be opened day after to-morrow."

"So much the better ; then we shall know at last what disposition the late M. Palamede has made of his property. Heh, heh ! Master Scipio, if you should happen to be down in the will for something it would beat the Castro Galleons enterprise all hollow and you would not have to go around hunting up a new vein."

"The new vein is found already !" exclaims Scipio, drawing himself up with an air of confidence, "and if there is anything coming to me under the will the money will be employed in working it. I do not intend to die without letting the world know my capacity. I have an idea that is worth a fortune, and it was that I might talk it over with Jacques that I came straight to Jeand'heurs."

You should see the look of mingled alarm and aversion that Zelig casts on Scipio Mouginot. If my cousin's blue eyes had in them the potentiality of a voltaic pile I do not think that Uncle Scipio would be put to the trouble of looking for another vein : he would be blasted, annihilated.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE following morning Uncle Scipio expresses a desire to take a look over the paper mill. When we come to the storerooms he touches a

bale of rags with the toe of his boot and negligently asks :

“What does that contain ? ”

“Why, rags, of course,” the cousin answers, “that go to make the pulp.”

“What ! ” he cries, “you don’t mean to tell me that you still make paper out of rags ? ”

“Certainly we do, Monsieur Mouginot ; it is the only material I know of on which we can depend to produce a first-class article.”

“But you are fifty years behind the age ! Rag paper—why, it goes back to the days when the industry was in its infancy ! If you wish, Monsieur Delorme, I will impart to you a process for manufacturing paper that can’t be beat from a material that will cost you next to nothing. And then, with only some slight alterations in your machinery, you will realize enormous profits.”

“I am very much obliged to you,” my cousin dryly answers, “but we prefer to make less money and turn out goods that we are not ashamed to acknowledge.”

The afternoon is devoted to effecting the much-needed repairs to the traveler’s attire that he may be enabled to present himself not too discredibly in Mme. Mouginot-Tupin’s drawing-room. I take him over to Tremont, where the village barber makes short work with his American beard ; he has a clean shave on lips and chin, his hair is trimmed ; M. Delorme lends him a full suit of black—coat, waistcoat and trousers—which the indefatigable lady of the house takes on herself to alter to his proportions, and the next morning we order out the carryall and start for Villotte.

On entering the Mouginot-Tupin’s comfortable salon we find there the notary, Uncle Victor and the widow, seated in solemn state before the fireplace. The reception accorded us by M. Mouginot-Pechoin is of the most icy description.

On the contrary, Mme. Mouginot-Tupin, who has always owned up to harboring a weakness for Scipio's fine manners, graciously suffers her courteous kinsman to kiss her finger-tips and condescends to ask him to be seated.

"Since all are here who of right should be here," says M. Lespaillaudel, taking from his portfolio a large envelope fastened with five seals of red wax, "there is no reason, so far as I can see, why we should delay longer to make ourselves acquainted with the last wishes of my lamented client."

Amid a solemn silence he commences his reading in a low, thick voice.

Palamede Mouginot, that puny, insignificant little snip of a man, who all his life long had trembled at the sound of his wife's voice, suddenly stands revealed to us in his true light. Like all weak and cringing natures, he was spiteful and vindictive at heart. If he continued to bear the yoke of Mme. Mouginot, *nee* Tupin, without a murmur, he was none the less amassing, somewhere in the depths of his abject soul, a fund of bitter resentment, and the means he had adopted to get even with his wife for her intolerable tyranny was to execute in profound secrecy the following remarkable will:

"I, Palamede Mouginot, the subscriber to this instrument, being in unimpaired health, physical as well as mental, do declare this to be my last will and testament.

"Whereas I have never during life been accorded the privilege of calling my soul my own, it is my intention after death, so far as in me lies, to amend this condition of affairs. To this end I bequeath to my wife Nathalie Tupin (of Anglecourts), in remembrance of our long co-sociation:

"First, the sum of one thousand francs, to

be expended in masses for the repose of which my soul stands in such urgent need ;

“ Secondly, all the laces, trinkets and various other finery that she compelled me to pay for during my lifetime, and,

“ Thirdly, the Peerage of Lorraine and the Barrois, which constituted her favorite reading and will be found on one of the shelves in my library.

“ The residue of my estate to revert to my natural heirs, Scipio, Victor and Jacques Mouginot, in equal proportions, one-third to each.

“ I appoint M. Lespaillaudel, notary at Villotte, executor of this my will, and beg his acceptance, in recompense for his trouble, of a diamond ring of the value of five hundred francs.”

At the beginning of the reading the expression on my aunt's severely Roman countenance is one of indulgent curiosity, while both my uncles are manifestly ill at ease ; but when the notary comes to the concluding paragraphs the faces of Victor and Scipio mantle with ill-suppressed exultation. As for the lady, her stupefaction, rage and humiliation are so great that they fairly take away her breath.

“ It is a mystification ! ” she screams, bouncing up from her chair ; “ the poor man was not in possession of his faculties.”

“ I do not agree with you there, madame,” my uncle Victor replies. “ On the contrary, I think that my brother acted very sensibly.”

“ You have reason to think so,” she retorts, “ seeing that you profit by your poor brother's driveling lunacy. That will be an injustice ; I shall contest it ; I will invoke the law—”

“ I advise you not to go to law, madame,” the notary interrupts. “ You would lose your case.”

Scipio considers it his duty to say something.

“Dear lady,” he declares, puckering his lips into a persuasive smile, “believe me, I most sincerely regret what has occurred—”

“Enough, sir ! I desire none of your regrets—I bid you all good-day.”

And she leaves the room with the air of an offended queen of tragedy, her long trail sweeping the floor behind her.

We accompany the man of law to his office, where Scipio remains closeted with him, while M. Delorme and I make haste to return to Jeand’heurs.

“Ladies,” he cries, exultantly, bursting into the dining-room, where Mme. Delorme and Zelig are engaged in mending the family linen, “ladies, let me present to you a capitalist ! Jacques is one of his uncle’s heirs, and steps into a tidy little fortune of sixty thousand francs. Give him joy of his good luck !”

My cousin, kind Mme. Delorme, gives me a hearty embrace ; but Zelig, on the other hand, seems to be lacking in warmth. I tell myself that not only has she no thought of love for me, but for some mysterious, unknown reason she has conceived a feeling of aversion.

It is not until two days later that Scipio shows his face again. He has profited by his visit to Villotte to cast his skin, and is once more the brilliant, irresistible and self-assured Scipio whom I knew in the old Parisian days. Master Lespaillaudel, the notary, has evidently made him an advance, for he is equipped anew from top to toe : black frock-coat and trousers, dark-gray overcoat and tall silk hat surrounded by a deep band of crape. He has even succeeded in procuring somewhere a magnificent morocco portfolio, which he carries under his arm with conscious dignity as he enters the room and deposits it in a conspicuous place upon a small table.

At dinner his manner toward every one is

courteous and charming in the extreme, but it is me whom he selects above all the rest as the object of his blandishments.

“Isn’t he getting to be a handsome young fellow, hey?” he exclaims. “There is one of us who won’t discredit the name of Mouginot, at all events!”

Although I am come to know my uncle Scipio pretty thoroughly by this time, still these encomiums, with which I have not been surfeited in the past, titillate my self-love agreeably. All the Mouginots are vain; it runs in the blood, and in this respect I am faithful to the family traditions. My foible reasserts itself under the pleasing influence of my uncle’s flatteries. I am not displeased to be complimented on my personal advantages, and consider that Scipio Mouginot is doing a very handsome thing by me in singing my praises in Zélie’s presence. I have hopes that her hard heart will soften on hearing what a tremendous fellow I am and that she will put off her cruel indifference. Will my uncle’s superlatives and wheedling eulogies produce the effect I am expecting from them? I know not; but, at all events, they have not passed unnoticed. Zélie has raised her eyes from off her plate and is watching Scipio’s performance with anxious solicitude.

As we are about to rise from table the latter turns to M. Delorme, who has intimated that I am to go back to the mill with him, and, discharging at him his most killing smile:

“My dear host,” he says, “allow me to deprive you for a short time of our friend Jacques. I want to have a little talk with him about our family affairs, and, if you have no objection, will take him with me to the garden. I will restore him to you in an hour.”

M. Delorme gives a nod of the head in token of assent and goes off alone in the direction of the works, while Scipio, slipping his arm through

mine, passes out at the door opening on the kitchen garden. I fail to notice that Zélie has risen at the same time as we and glided after us into an alley parallel to that in which we are slowly walking to and fro.

“My dear child,” he begins, “now that we are alone, we’ll make our talk brief and to the point. When, owing to circumstances over which I had no control, I was forced to leave my native land and become an exile, I told you that as soon as Fortune smiled on me once more I would return and be to you again a protector. That time is come, and I hasten to offer you a share in the glory and the profits of a most splendid enterprise—”

His exordium arouses my distrust, and looking at my uncle with the watchful air of a man who feels it necessary to be on his guard, I coldly ask :

“What is it ? ”

“An idea of the greatest promise, which fructified in my brain the other morning as I was inspecting your works. I did not care to speak of it before Delorme, who is entirely a creature of routine. But with you the case is different ; you are young, you are open to conviction ; you will comprehend me. Listen, and follow me closely. The manufacture of paper from cotton or linen is the *pons asinorum*, and at the present price of rags no one can begin to make a living at it. If we would do a large business and make money rapidly we must look for a raw material that is abundant, is obtainable at a minimum of cost, and will permit us to go into the market with our product and undersell all our competitors. Now, that raw material I have discovered—it is to be found in every land, in every clime ; its only cost is the exertion of stooping to gather it. It is the nettle, the despised, common, every-day nettle ! My experience has taught me that for textile

purposes it has no superior. Now you see my drift! We start a company and build and equip an immense factory, which we keep running with nettles, untold millions of nettles collected in France and the circumjacent countries. It will be killing two birds with one stone: we fill our warehouses and do a service to the agriculturist. Not only will our material cost us nothing, but the peasants will pay us handsomely for ridding them of a noxious weed that destroys the productiveness of their farms. What have you to say to that? Isn't it a stroke of genius? Are there not millions in it?"

I never fail to be dazed and stupefied by the kaleidoscopic variety of the images that this wonderful man evolves from his fertile brain and the rapidity with which he shifts them. For all that, however, I am not going to let him bamboozle me, and I cautiously make answer:

"That is a very fine scheme of yours, uncle; but I prefer a bird in the hand to two in the bush. Moreover, it is out of the question that I should leave M. Delorme."

"I know how attached you are to the Delormes, and should hesitate to ask you to leave them temporarily were it not that your assistance is absolutely indispensable to me. At the commencement of the business I must have a man on whom I can rely implicitly—one who knows all the ins and outs of the manufacturing processes, and you are the only one I know of, Jacques, who has those qualifications. Later on, when my enterprise is fairly on its legs, you can return to Jean-d'heurs, if you desire."

"You surely can't mean what you say, uncle. What, you would take me from M. Delorme, my best friend, who gave me shelter and food when I was friendless, who taught

me all I know of the paper business—you ask me to leave him and be your assistant in ruining his business? If I were to do it I should be a base ingrate, the lowest of the low!”

“You prefer to display your ingratitude toward me,” replies my uncle, crossing his arms upon his chest with an injured air. “You say that Delorme offered you hospitality—and I, what did I do, I would like to know, when you came knocking at my door? Did I not open heart and purse to you? Did I not give you as good an education as could be had in Paris; did I not instill into your mind a practical knowledge of business? I know it is not in good taste to twit a man with the services you have rendered him—but just look for a moment at what Delorme has done for you and what I have done; you’ll see to which side the balance inclines. For five years I stood to you not in the relation of guardian, but of bosom friend—of father! And now, when I ask you for a trifling mark of confidence and affection, you give me a hard, cold—No. Ah!” he adds, in a tearful voice, raising his *seemingly* trembling hands toward heaven, “truly I am unfortunate! I return from exile with a sublime idea; fortune seems to smile on me; I say to myself: I am safe—the haven is at hand! And then comes a cruel, brutal blow, buffeting me forth again into the raging storm and outer darkness—and whose is the hand that strikes that blow? It is the hand of my nephew, whom I have reared from childhood—my nephew, whom I have cherished and adored. It is enough to break one’s heart!”

There is no gainsaying the fact that his face and manner indicate deep distress; may not his grief be sincere? It is not to be denied that Scipio did come to my assistance when I first landed in Paris; I was homeless and penniless; what would have become of me

had he shown himself as hard and pitiless as I am now? Grant that he is unreliable, lighter than thistle-down, fickle, and an unblushing, selfish egotist, is that a reason why I should show myself unmindful of benefits conferred on me and dismiss his request with a brusque refusal, unsoftened by any word of explanation?

"Forgive me, my dear uncle," I stammer, "and rest assured that—"

"No, no," he says; "do not give me your answer yet; I do not wish to extort from your sensibility a decision that should be the result of calm consideration. Take time to reflect, consult your heart—this evening will be time enough to let me know if your resolution still remains unchanged."

Thereupon he walks away, and I hear a gentle feminine voice murmuring: "Jacques!"

I turn and behold my cousin Zélie, who comes forward to me from an arched portal that has been cut in the living wall of verdure.

"Were you there, cousin?"

"Yes," she unhesitatingly owns up; "I heard all that was said. Oh, Jacques! I beg you do not listen to your uncle—do not again allow yourself to be deluded by that adventurer!"

"Now, Zélie, you could not have thought I was in doubt what to do?"

"Yes, I did think so, and M. Mouginot thinks so, too. I saw that you were on the point of yielding, and if you only knew the pain it caused me! Jacques," my cousin continues, "stay here with us; do not go away from Jeand'heurs. Stay for papa's sake—and for mine a little bit, as well."

"Then you would have been sorry to have me go away, would you, Zélie?"

She does not answer, but her eyes become humid again and I can see by the convulsive motion of her throat that a storm of sobs is rising.

"I never meant to leave you, Zélie. I could not be happy away from here because—because I love you!"

"Really and truly, do you?" she exclaims. "And I, too, Jacques—I love you with all my heart."

"Well, if that's the case, why don't you give each other a good kiss?"

We turn in great confusion and find ourselves confronted by M. Delorme. He is come from the paper mill to ascertain what detained me so long in the garden.

"You love each other," he goes on. "I suspected long ago how the land lay—and so did my wife. I always said to her: 'Have patience; give them time and there will come a day when they will straighten out matters for themselves.' Remain as you are for a year and next spring you shall be married."

Nothing is seen of Scipio Mouginot during the day. About six o'clock, when we are all together in the dining-room, we hear the sound of wheels before the house, and on looking from the window behold my uncle in the act of alighting from a public hack. A moment later he enters the vestibule.

"My dear boy," he exclaims, with that fine assurance which never deserts him, "I suppose you have reflected on the proposition I made you a while ago? The carriage that is to bear me away from here is waiting, and I am come to learn your answer."

"Do you answer for me, Cousin Delorme," say I, turning to my father-in-law that is to be.

"Monsieur Scipio Mouginot," replies the cousin, "Jacques is infinitely obliged for your kind remembrance of him; but he cannot leave Jeand'heurs for a reason which, I have no doubt, will appear to you perfectly valid and satisfactory. I have the pleasure of announcing to you the engagement of your nephew and

my daughter Zélie. A year hence the two youngsters will be married, and if you are in the neighborhood I hope you will honor us with your presence at the wedding."

"Ah, ha!" ejaculates my uncle, in deep amazement, while I throw my arms about Mamma Delorme's neck. This denouement has never occurred to Scipio, but he is not a man to remain nonplused for any great length of time; and, beaming on us with one of his genial smiles: "Accept my hearty congratulations," he goes on, with a polite bow to the ladies. "I have always had the dear boy's happiness at heart, and if he would rather be married than be rich I have not a word to say. Thanks, Monsieur Delorme, for your hospitality. Ladies, my best respects. Adieu, Jacques; I'll make a fortune without your assistance, and perhaps some day you'll be sorry!"

We accompany him to the stoop. He jumps nimbly into the vehicle, waves his hand to us in a parting salute, the driver whips up his nag and in a twinkling carriage and traveler are lost to sight beneath the archway of the courtyard.

Notwithstanding his confident assurances my uncle has not yet struck his vein. Six months after his leaving us the grand scheme of making paper from nettles came to naught for lack of subscribers to the stock, and Scipio Mouginot was once more compelled to shift his gun to the other shoulder. About the same time we were informed of an event that brought dismay to the pharmacy of the Mouginot-Pichoins. That model boy, my cousin Aristide, had not fulfilled the promise of his youth, and had left college without completing his course; he did not take kindly to the study of pharmaceutical science, but his tastes and aptitudes seemed rather to incline to the exercises of the *manège*. After astonishing the staid citizens of Villotte

by his eccentric dress, his equestrian turnouts and his pranks at the country balls in the vicinity, he capped the climax by running away with one of the lady riders of a traveling circus, and Lawyer Jacobi was sent forth into the world to bring back the prodigal son.

In accordance with my cousin Delorme's wishes, Zelig and I remained engaged for a year, and I assure you that the time did not seem long to me. I was enabled to verify the correctness of what a German writer (Jean Paul Richter, I think,) says on the subject: "For a young couple to become affianced early and marry late, it is like listening to the lark singing at sunrise in the heavens and eating him roasted at night for dinner." Only, although we are married now, we have not killed our lark, and he keeps on singing for us still as sweetly as ever.

THE END.

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--- AT THE ---

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N. E. WOOD, Manager,
New England Clam Bake Building.

F. K. McDONALD, Manager,
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WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION. }
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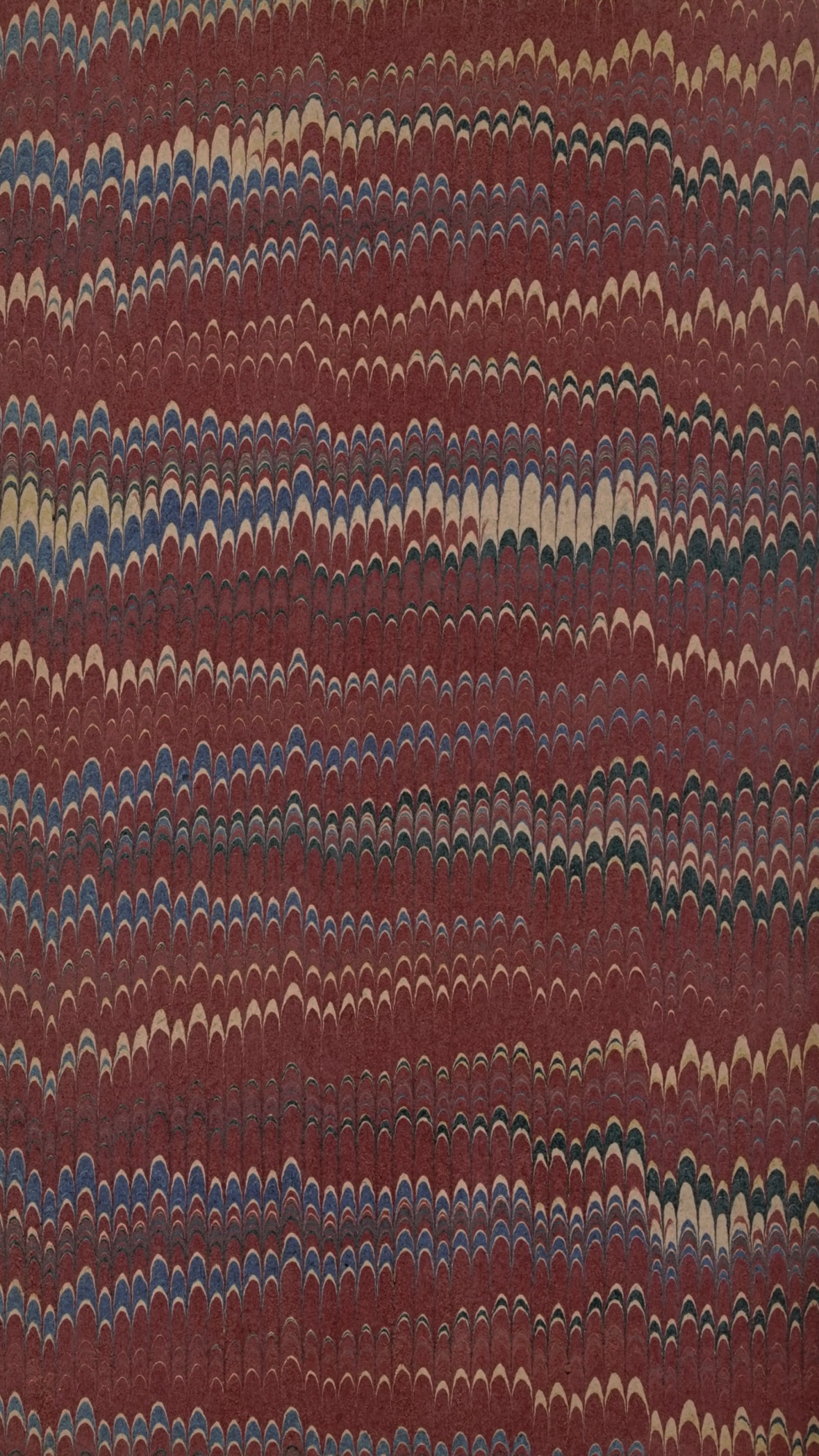
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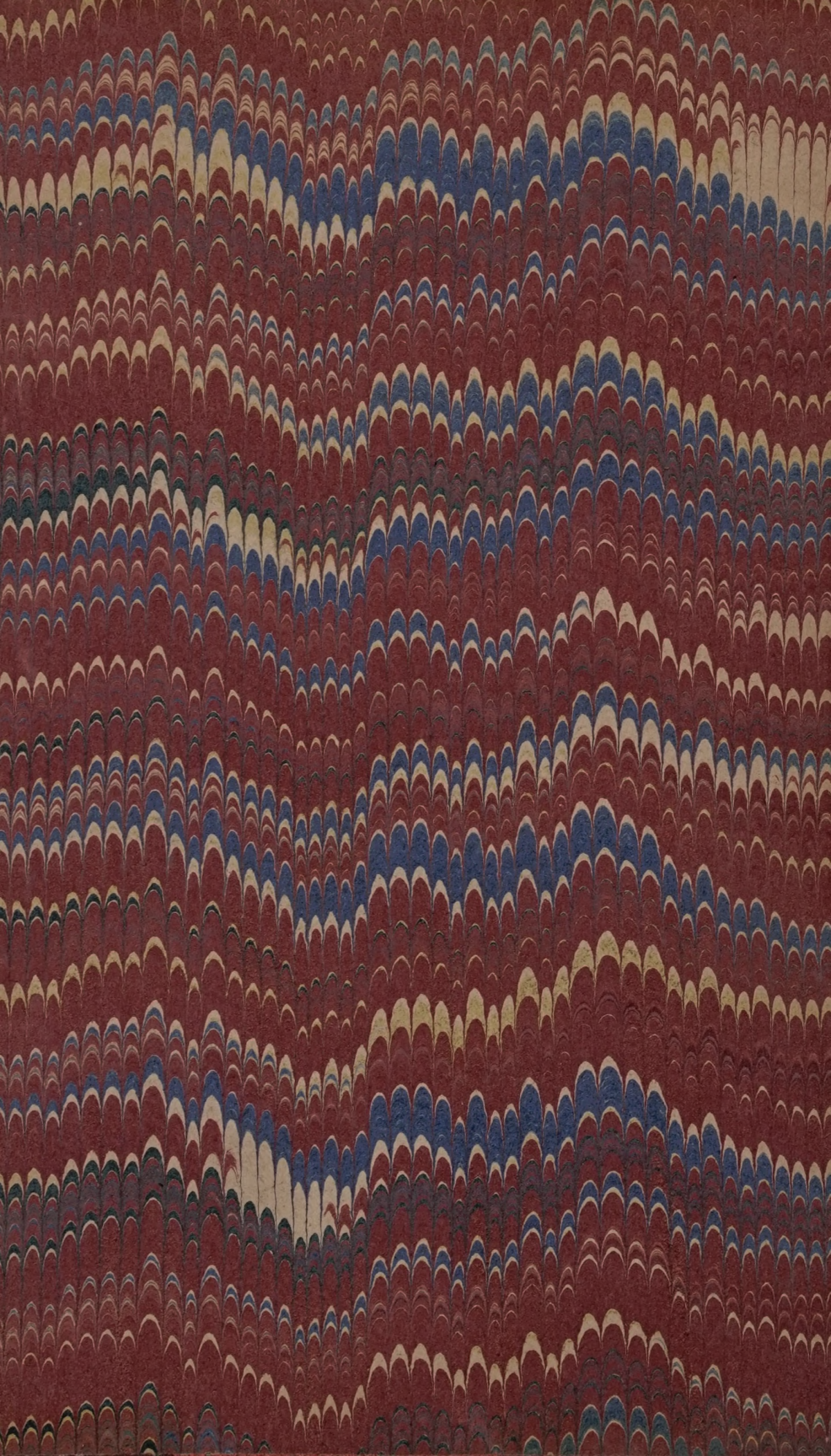
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